THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

Everyday life in distance education: Case studies with three families in Queensland, Australia

by Nicole C. Green ©

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Elementary Education

Edmonton, Alberta

Spring, 2006

Library and
Archives Canada

Published Heritage
Branch

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Bibliothèque et
Archives Canada

Direction du
Patrimoine de l'édition

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Your file Votre référence
ISBN: 0-494-13979-X
Our file Notre référence
ISBN: 0-494-13979-X

NOTICE:
The author has granted a non-exclusive license allowing Library and Archives Canada to reproduce, publish, archive, preserve, conserve, communicate to the public by telecommunication or on the Internet, loan, distribute and sell theses worldwide, for commercial or non-commercial purposes, in microform, paper, electronic and/or any other formats.

The author retains copyright ownership and moral rights in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

AVIS:
L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque et Archives Canada de reproduire, publier, archiver, sauvegarder, conserver, transmettre au public par télécommunication ou par l'Internet, prêter, distribuer et vendre des thèses partout dans le monde, à des fins commerciales ou autres, sur support microforme, papier, électronique et/ou autres formats.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur et des droits moraux qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

In compliance with the Canadian Privacy Act some supporting forms may have been removed from this thesis.

While these forms may be included in the document page count, their removal does not represent any loss of content from the thesis.

Conformément à la loi canadienne sur la protection de la vie privée, quelques formulaires secondaires ont été enlevés de cette thèse.

Bien que ces formulaires aient inclus dans la pagination, il n'y aura aucun contenu manquant.

Canada

Abstract

In this research I conducted qualitative case studies of the distance education experience of three families enrolled in a school of distance education in Queensland, Australia. My intent was to learn how the mothers as home tutors and their children experience distance education and how it is that they come to experience it in that way.

Using *place* as a central idea, I asked how place was at work in the participants' experience of the distance education program. I understood place as both *the everyday life that evolves* because of the way people inhabit a space and as *the source of structural formations—resources, rules, available relationships—that constrain the everyday lives* people can shape for themselves. I also understood that people construct their identities—values, motivations, roles, definitions—through their actions in everyday life, and these influence their subsequent actions or the ways in which they inhabit places. In the inquiry I also drew from cultural geographers' understandings about the significance of place, sense of place, and children's place attachment.

Recognizing that the families' schoolrooms as places were part of the larger places of their sheep or cattle properties, I studied participants' everyday lives in both their schoolrooms and on their properties. Over a period of five months, I made three-day monthly visits to each family. The home tutors also wrote in dialogue journals during that time. My data collection activities included observations, formal interviews and informal conversations, field notes, and having participants take photographs of their everyday lives. The photographs were used to support discussion in interviews.

To offer analyses and interpretations I wrote narrative portraits for each family, identified key dimensions of the home tutors' experience, contrasted the children's everyday lives inside of and outside of their schoolrooms, and crafted an interpretive account of how everyday life in the schoolrooms evolved as it did. The distance education program activities and everyday life in the schoolrooms became an unpleasant chore for both home tutors and their children. My culminating reflections offered a number of possible focuses for conversations about improvements to distance education.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION 1
  Researching distance education in Queensland, Australia 1
  Researching the "school learning place" in distance education 4
    Statement of the problem 4
    Conceptual framework 5
    Purpose of the research 7
    Research question 7
    Method 8
      Michaelson family 9
      Carson family 10
      Mitchell family 11
  Historical overview of distance education in Queensland 12
  Overview of the Gorman School of Distance Education 16
  Structure of the dissertation 20

CHAPTER 2: PLACE: BEGINNINGS OF A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK 23
  Space which has meaning: place 24
  People and places as mutually transformative 25
  Dimensions or attributes of the meaning of places 26
  Children and place attachment 29
  Discussion 30

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH ON DISTANCE EDUCATION IN AUSTRALIA 32
  Sites of teaching and learning in distance education 32
  Curriculum improvement projects and research 34
  The parent as home tutor 37
  Home tutors' pedagogical knowledge 38
  Professional development for home tutors 40
  Research on technologies for learning 42

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY 47
  Theoretical underpinnings of the research 47
    Interpretive Inquiry within the constructivist paradigm 48
    Place as an interpretive framework 52
    Curriculum-as-lived-experiences 61
  Conducting the inquiry 62
    Site 62
    Participants 62
    The schedule of data collection 64
    Forms of data collection 65
      Field notes 66
      Participant observation 69

Semi-structured interviews and informal conversations 70
Photography: creating images for discussion 75
Dialogue journals 79
Documents/artefacts 81
Data analysis 82
Constructing narrative accounts 83
Further Interpretive Work 84

CHAPTER 5: THE MICHAELSON FAMILY 86
About Louise 86
About Thomas and Timothy 92
The schoolroom 95
Beginning experiences of distance education 99
A portrait of everyday life 101
Reflections on the home educating experience 108
Sharing views on education, goals and hopes 112

CHAPTER 6: THE CARSON FAMILY 114
About Kate 114
About Melissa 119
The schoolroom 123
Beginning experiences of distance education 125
A portrait of everyday life 128
Reflections on the home educating experience 135
Sharing views on education, goals and hopes 139

CHAPTER 7: THE MITCHELL FAMILY 141
About Cherie 141
About Nathan and Adrian 145
About Kyle and Paul 147
The schoolroom 149
Beginning experiences of distance education 152
A portrait of everyday life 153
Reflections on the home educating experience 162
Sharing views on education, goals and hopes 166

CHAPTER 8:
BEING HOME TUTORS: KEY DIMENSIONS OF THE EXPERIENCE 168
Time, energy, and stress 169
Ambiguity 174
Pride in children's progress 176
Discussion 177

CHAPTER 9: THE CHILDREN'S EVERYDAY LIVES 180
  Everyday life outside of the schoolroom 180
    Dangerous places 181
    House yard use 182
    Areas surrounding the house yards 182
    Social affiliation 183
    Places for retreat 184
    Imaginative play in undefined space 186
    Work 188
  Everyday life inside the schoolrooms 192
    Thomas 193
    Timothy 194
    Nathan 195
    Adrian 196
    Melissa 196
  Discussion 197

CHAPTER 10: FROM SCHOOLROOM TO "SCHOOL LEARNING PLACE" 199
  The "how" and "why" of the school learning place experience 202
    Choosing distance education and home tutoring 202
    The distance education materials 204
    Living the curriculum-as-plan 207
    Home tutoring as "a chore" and doing a good job 211
    Being "mother-teachers" 213
    The children's experience of their "mother-teachers" 219
    The mothers' perceptions of themselves in the schoolroom 221
  Discussion 226

CHAPTER 11: CLOSING REFLECTIONS AND WONDERINGS 231
  Reflections on the research process 232
  Wonderings about distance education 238
    Awakening from my idealistic preconceptions 239
    Home tutor/mothers and children/students constructing identities 245
      Evaluating students 246
      Connecting the curriculum to students' identities 246
      Home tutor/mothers' identities 247
  Evaluating the goodness of the inquiry 250

REFERENCES 254

GLOSSARY 265

APPENDIX A: LETTERS OF INTRODUCTION 267
  From Acting Deputy Principal 267
  To parents/home tutors 268

  To children 270

APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORMS 271
  For parents/home tutors 271
  For children 272

APPENDIX C: CONVERSATIONS WITH HOME TUTORS 273
  Interview 1 273
  Interview 2 274
  Interview 3 276

APPENDIX D: CONVERSATIONS WITH CHILDREN 278
  Interview 1 278
  Interview 2 278
  Interview 3 279

List of Tables

Table 1
Examples of the Use of the Analytic Framework for the Interpretive Account: "The 'How' and 'Why' of the School Learning Place Experience"........................223

List of Figures

Figure 1 Structural formations, everyday life and the schoolrooms I........................60

Figure 2 The hermeneutic circle 83

Figure 3 The Michaelson's schoolroom...96

Figure 4 The Carson's schoolroom 124

Figure 5 The Mitchell's schoolroom...150

Figure 6 Guidelines from curriculum: How to set up the “schoolroom” work area......206

Figure 7 Structural formations, everyday life and the schoolrooms II.....................227

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Researching distance education in Queensland, Australia

July 25th
My first visit to the Michaelson's. My first visit to any of the families. I feel so alone. Alone in research. Office mates and university colleagues too far away to share my fears and anxieties. Supervisor and committee members too far away to ask methodological questions. Friends too far away to understand.

In my car, sound of the engine, old songs on my tape deck, quick bump of a cattle grid. In my car, sight of brown landscape, trees in the distance, the odd car or semi-trailer and a friendly wave from the driver. Large blue sky; open, clutter-less land; seemingly endless narrow roads, and then…

Relief! I am on the right road! A small sign, a windmill and looming shady trees. A turn right and a gate – no remote control? Three gates to discover; open, close, open, close, open, close.

Feelings of being a city girl. I am distastefully attentive to the smell of cattle crammed into the metal cages on the semi-trailers passing by; to the dust which has clogged my nose and caused it to bleed, and to the concern for my car tyres on the rocky, uneven surface over the next 21 kilometres to the family's house.

Was I ever a country girl? I have forgotten how to drive safely through "bull dust," I swerve and veer and become relieved that there is nothing, nothing around to drive my car into. A connection is lost, could it be regained? Although my choice was not to continue a life in the country, I always felt that I could if I had to. Not now. On this Sunday, as I step out of my dust-soaked car and hear Louise calling my name to join her in the schoolroom (she is spending the afternoon in the schoolroom preparing for the week ahead), I stand back and admire the distance…I stand back and wonder with curiosity about the distance…distance from anywhere…distance from everyone… I smile with openness and walk over to the small wooden building. City meets country.

August 1st
Sunday again already. I haven't felt like I have had time to breathe since I arrived home last Tuesday evening from the first home visit…reviewing transcripts, revising interview questions, responding to journal entries, all in addition to what is required of me in my teaching role at the school. I am relieved that this week's visit is only a two-hour drive.

When I visit some place new, I experience such nervousness – am I on the right road? Will I make it on time? It is always a sense of relief to arrive. This week, it is not so much about the shorter drive, it is the feeling of being less remote, less distanced…

August 8th
Journeying on the 40 kilometres of dirt road, I experience feelings of despair hoping my car survives the length of my inquiry…the corrugation, the unmissed boulders lying on the road, the dirt sticking to the new suspension. Distance is so relative. I recall fellow graduate students at the University of Alberta contemplating the one-hour drive to a school outside of the city. I smile as I think about the 1600 kilometres I have already journeyed in three visits, with nine visits remaining.

I am feeling emotionally exhausted even though I am enjoying the visits so much. Staying with a family, each family I do not know very well, keeps me feeling on edge for the entire three days. I am shy and less talkative so it is a big effort for me to be around the family constantly and in conversation. I am fortunate the families are so welcoming and hospitable.
(Green, field notes, 2004)

In July 2004, I entered into an inquiry relationship with three families enrolled in a school of distance education in Queensland, Australia. The school community lives within an area over 300 000 square kilometres. Most of the families own or manage sheep and/or beef grazing properties which are situated in isolated areas of Queensland. The families include approximately 200 children who receive their education by correspondence papers and daily radio lessons. The students complete their school work at home with a home tutor, who is most often the mother, with support and assistance provided by the school of distance education's teaching and support staff.

Prior to my doctoral program, I held a teaching position in this school of distance education for almost two years. When I started the position it felt extremely strange working in an office area, rather than creating a classroom community with a group of students. It also felt odd developing relationships with families and students over the radio, through letters and emails, on the telephone and eventually during short face-to-face visits. My work as a teacher was very different from what it had been when I taught in a traditional classroom. In my first two-year teaching position I had the opportunity to know each family and all staff in the school community. I also had the opportunity to try out all the "latest" pedagogical ideas I had been introduced to in my university courses without feeling pressured by the time schedules and administrative expectations I had experienced in my "city" practicum. I also felt at home with a school environment and routines similar to those I had experienced when I was a student in public schools.

The differences in distance education teaching prompted me to reflect on how I had learned as a student in traditional schooling and to ask questions about how students in distance education learn. I had to rethink my role as a teacher and question how my understandings and beliefs about learning fit with the concept of home schooling. Distance education fell outside of my prior experiences and taken-for-granted assumptions about how schools can work.

My first two years of teaching at a school of distance education presented me with challenges as well as joys and memorable experiences to recall. The challenges became research interests as I strove to understand the schooling experience of the families I worked with. I was certain that if I could better understand the families' experiences of "school" this could inform my work and perhaps that of my colleagues at schools of distance education. In the course of my doctoral program I developed my interests into the following conceptualization of this research inquiry.

Researching the "school learning place" in distance education

Statement of the problem

A review of the distance education literature in Australia highlights that, although there are many accounts of distance education experience by teachers and outside researchers, there has been very little inquiry into the families' day-to-day experiences of teaching and learning at home and their perspectives on distance education. A review also reveals that home tutors tend to be viewed by researchers and school of distance education school staff as merely curriculum technicians (Boylan, 1996; Boylan & Wallace, 1996). Although the complex and varied roles of home tutors in a distance education context are acknowledged, research has focused on their supervision and relational skills in school learning activities and on how to "train" home tutors to successfully implement the curriculum. Much of the research has focused on achievement outcomes in asking questions about the effectiveness of the technology used and the particular curricula delivered by distance modes (Boylan, Wallace & Richmond, 2000; Leadbetter, 1998; Louden & Rivalland, 1995; Vivian, 1986). Studying inputs and outputs in this way treats families and children receiving distance education as a "black box" (Canning, 1992; Harley, 1985). Distance education research has not taken account of what more holistically transpires in the conduct of distance education in families' homes.

What is needed is research that generates understanding and insight into how families can experience distance education generally before specific suggestions about curriculum or teaching and learning practices can more usefully be made to curriculum planners or to staff working at schools of distance education. What is home schooling like as a component of living and working on sheep or cattle properties (ranches or stations), and as but one part of the families' everyday lives?

Conceptual framework

As a conceptual framework, *place* provides a structure for a more holistic examination of the home schooling experience. Place does not refer to simply a physical location but to the whole experience of being there (Ellis, In press). Eyles (1989) argues that places are socially constructed, within the constraints of social and physical resources, through the introduction of social structures (rules and resources) and the available relationships (with individuals, institutions and ideas). People's everyday lives—all of their routine activities and interactions—are the backdrop of meaning for their interpretations of events and actions and the structural formations of *place* enable or constrain the nature of everyday life (Eyles, 1989).

In so far as the structural formations of place limit people's actions in everyday life, they also limit the identities that can be created. Eyles (1989) notes that it is through people's actions in everyday life that they build, maintain and reconstruct the very definitions, roles, values and motivations that shape their actions and ways of seeing in the world. In other words, people create or re-create their identities through their actions in everyday life.

Places are not static but rather evolve as the net effect of the nature of inhabitation (Ashcroft, 2001). Eyles (1989) similarly acknowledges that the everyday life that evolves in a place becomes a structure--like rules, resources, available relationships—that constrains the everyday lives people can individually shape for themselves. Ashcroft (2001) also recognizes that the identities inhabitants bring with them to a place, will affect the ways in which they inhabit it. This insight extends and supplements Eyles' set of ideas about place and the significance of its structural formations for everyday life and identity. Eyles sees people constructing identities through their actions in everyday life and he recognizes that these identities (roles, values, motivations, definitions) influence subsequent ways of seeing and acting in the world. Ashcroft's discussion makes it explicit that people's identities will affect the way they shape their everyday lives in a place. The overall net effect is that the everyday life that evolves in a place is related to or bound up with the identities of inhabitants.

Place is space that is invested with meaning (Geertz, 1973, cited in Helfenbein, 2004). The nature of people's everyday lives in a place contributes to the meaning a place holds for them. Relph (1993) suggests that places are territories of meaning resulting from what one gives to and receives from a place. Place also acquires its significance from stories about what has happened there (Glassie, 1982, cited in Smith, Light & Roberts, 1998, p. 4).

Thus when home tutors and children come together to do home schooling in their **schoolrooms** they can be understood to be creating "**school learning places**." The conceptual framework of *place* provides a structure for attending to the significance of: the resources they use, the rules and routines they introduce, the relationships they develop that are specific to this place, the meaning that accretes from stories about what has happened in this place; and how the backdrop of meaning of everyday life outside of the "the school learning place" informs interpretation of events and activities within the school learning place. In this study I use the term, "schoolroom," as the participants do, to refer to the physical location where home schooling is conducted. I use the term, "school learning place," to refer to the place that evolves from the way the schoolroom is inhabited.

Using the conceptual framework of *place* to support a holistic approach to studying the experience of home tutors and children is also congruent with key ideas from hermeneutics. To understand or more adequately interpret phenomena requires attention to part/whole relationships, micro and macro contexts, and a constant movement between the specific and general to discern webs of meaning.

Using place as a conceptual framework also supports an orientation to "curriculum-as-lived" (Aoki, 1991) as opposed to curriculum as planned and or as implemented without attention to context. Using "place" instead of "context" serves as a reminder of the human agency in place making and prompts critical interpretation of the social structures and relationships that shape everyday life experiences in school learning places created in distance education.

Purpose of the research

The purpose of this research was to conduct qualitative case studies of three families enrolled in a school of distance education in Queensland, Australia in an effort to understand the nature and significance of the school learning places created in their home schooling experience.

Research question

The initial research question framed for the study was: **How do home tutors and students create and experience a "school learning place" for the distance education program?** My use of the word, "experience," in this question reflected my understanding of place as everyday life in a space, or the whole experience of being there. I used the word, "create," because I expected that home tutors would have agency in introducing rules, routines, and resources in the schoolrooms. I also expected that both home tutors and children would be shaping everyday lives for themselves in the schoolrooms. In hindsight I would say that the research question became: **How did everyday life in the families' schoolrooms come to evolve as it did?** This second version of a way of framing the research question better reflects an appreciation that much of what happened in the schoolrooms happened in spite of rather than because of the agency of the home tutors and children. I tried to make sense of the home tutors' and children's everyday lives both within and outside of the schoolrooms. I sought to understand how each "school learning place" -- *the everyday life that was evolving in the schoolroom* -- reflected or arose from the resources, relationships, rules, and routines of the schoolroom and the identities of its inhabitants. Using place as a conceptual framework, I recognized that the everyday lives home tutors and children shaped for themselves in the schoolrooms would be constrained by structural formations of place -- rules, resources, routines, relationships -- and influenced by the identities they had already been constructing in places outside of the schoolrooms. I also expected that the meaning of activities in the schoolrooms to home tutors and children would be informed by the values, motivations, and roles they experienced in their routine activities and interactions outside of the schoolrooms.

Method

Data collection occurred during four three-day visits with each family over a period of five months. My research activities included observations, writing field notes, interviews, conversations, discussing photographs taken by home tutors and children, keeping dialogue journals with home tutors, analysis and interpretation. Throughout all of my research activities, my efforts were dedicated to making sense -- finding patterns, connections, and relationships to figure out the dynamics of what was happening and why -- in terms of the participants' everyday lives, the participants' identities, and the structural formations of place both within the schoolrooms and outside of the schoolrooms on the families' properties.

As a first level of analysis I crafted a descriptive narrative portrait of each family and daily life on the family's property and in its schoolroom. In my further analysis work I examined all of my data to address three questions: (1) how did the mothers experience being home tutors; (2) how did the children experience the places of their everyday lives both in the schoolroom and on their properties; and (3) how did everyday life in the schoolrooms evolve as it did. In a set of closing reflections on the research process and the findings of the study, I identify ways in which my understanding of distance education for these families was transformed. I also offer a set of wonderings as potential entry points for conversations about improving distance education.

The participants in the study were the Michaelson, Carson and Mitchell families. Here I provide a brief description of each family and some biographical material for each home tutor.

Michaelson family

Louise and Daniel Michaelson and their two sons, Thomas, 8, and Timothy, 7, live on a cattle property [equivalent to the terms "ranch" or "station" used in North America] in Western Queensland. Louise has been home educating the boys for five years. The property the family manages and calls "home" is both geographically and climactically dissimilar to where Louise spent her childhood living in a small town in North America with her parents and a brother and sister both older than she. Louise attended her local elementary school and secondary school in North America prior to completing a college degree in Recreation Management. In her program she learned to operate sports programs, fitness programs, swimming pools and ice rinks in towns and cities. Louise knew she would choose a career that involved physical outdoor activity rather than, for example, sitting at a desk. Louise had never envisioned working with children, even though her recreational training required developing child-orientated programs.

As the curriculum work in the school learning place became more demanding, and the learning needs of Thomas and Timothy required further time and intentional assessment and planning, Louise began to consider the possibility of hiring a governess [a female employee from outside of the family who teaches the children the formal curriculum work]. At the end of the 2004 school year, following much discussion and deliberation, Louise and Daniel decided that hiring a governess was in the best interests of both Louise and her children. The governess moved to the Michaelson's property for the start of the 2005 school year to begin serving as home tutor with Thomas and Timothy.

Carson family

Kate and John Carson and their two daughters, Emma, 13, and Melissa, 10, live on the family's sheep and cattle property in Western Queensland. Emma is currently attending boarding school. Kate married John at about the time her in-law's bought the property they now live on and manage with their two daughters. Kate has been home schooling for nine years. Kate spent a short time enrolled in distance education in the 1960's before becoming a boarder in a nearby town for the remainder of her elementary schooling. She then moved further away from her family to attend a secondary boarding school in a large coastal city. Kate graduated from university with a Bachelor of Arts degree. At one point, because of her enjoyment of sport and physical activity, she considered being a physical education teacher. Kate was not interested in teaching, however, and is now pleased the opportunity passed. The prospect of controlling and piquing the interest of a class of twenty-five children daunts Kate as she feels she only has patience with, and for, her own children.

Kate organises the school year into three periods, with the second third of the year being the time when she is the busiest with work and volunteer commitments. During Term 2 and Term 3 of the school year, Melissa is encouraged to work independently and communicates with her mother via post-it notes when Kate is not at home to ask for assistance. Kate is grateful that Melissa is as independent as she is in Year 5, and is aware that if Melissa were younger, she would need to catch up on the days missed with Melissa in the schoolroom another way.

Mitchell family

Cherie and Jeremy Mitchell and their four sons—Nathan 9, Adrian 6, Kyle 5 and Paul 3—live on a sheep and cattle property in Western Queensland. They have lived there for over ten years and have recently purchased the property from Jeremy's parents. Cherie has been home educating the boys for six years. As a child, Cherie attended a small elementary school and travelled by bus to a larger town for secondary school.

Experiencing less enjoyment of schooling in her senior years, Cherie took a job as a nanny/governess working with a Preschool-aged child. Although Cherie has always enjoyed the company of children, she had never thought of being a teacher. When the opportunity arose, Cherie accepted a jillarooing position, as it is what she had originally hoped to be doing [a jillaroo is a woman who is learning to work on a sheep or cattle station]. She also felt that jillarooing would be more fun than her nanny/governess position.

Cherie found it difficult to be fully present to her children as a mother rather than as a home tutor outside of formal school time. She felt the pressure of providing both a formal education and a good everyday lifestyle in which Nathan, Adrian, Kyle and Paul could learn and develop. She worries about expecting too much from her children and of feeling stressed about things which are only a result of her own inability to relax during school time. Cherie appreciates the time she and Jeremy spend with their children playing football before school and at recess, working and relaxing in the garden together and moments of individual time with each of them.

The remainder of this chapter will provide information about the development of distance education in Queensland, Australia and about the particular school of distance education that was the site of my research. To protect anonymity, I have given this school the pseudonym, Gorman School of Distance Education (GSDE).

Historical overview of distance education in Queensland

During the last 94 years, the delivery of formal educational services to children in the rural and remote areas of Australia has evolved from the engagement of itinerant teachers with horses and buggies to the development of centralized programs using diverse technologies.

In 1909, to address the educational needs of children living in isolated and sparsely populated areas where it was impractical to establish schools, the Queensland Education Department provided portable tent schools to isolated communities (Higgins, 1994), and organized a small number of itinerant teachers to visit hundreds of families in allocated districts during each school year (Fowler, 1987). Travelling with buggies and horses until motorized transport was provided in 1912, each young male itinerant teacher was expected to carry all camping and living equipment, as well as food. It was considered an improper and too rough and laborious a lifestyle for female teachers. The male itinerant teacher would give lessons, test his students, exchange books and mark completed work during the visit with each family. Prior to his first visit, some students had previously received educational instruction from adult family members, while other children had received no academic instruction at all. Itinerant teachers expected parents to supervise the work set for students to complete before the next visit. In an overview of the history of distance education in Queensland, Moffatt (1997) states that itinerant teachers encountered varying quality in students' work and educational achievements due to time constraints, the educational level of parents, or the value parents placed on formal education. The number of itinerant teachers reached its peak in 1923, providing educational service for 16 districts covering an area of 815 000 square kilometres. The educational service was disbanded in 1933, when it was decided that the more centralised and formalised Primary Correspondence School in Brisbane could meet the needs of the students.

The Primary Correspondence School was established in 1927, gradually replacing itinerant teachers with it's own system of education in which instructions, directions, explanations and illustrations formed the subject lessons that were sent from Brisbane to the families living in sparsely populated regions in remote areas of Queensland (Higgins, 1994). In the beginning, individual teachers at the Primary Correspondence School wrote out lessons to meet the needs of their students. Over time, however, a system of assignments was developed to cover the state syllabus and the work undertaken in mainstream schools (Moffatt, 1997). The correspondence papers were returned by mail to the teacher in Brisbane for feedback, corrections and further advice which was returned to the student via the postal system. The growth of the Correspondence School continued through World War II when the rationing of tyres and petrol required those students who could not travel to school by foot, bicycle or horse to be enrolled. Following the War, men also enrolled due to disability or a wish to complete their interrupted education (Moffatt, 1997). Although the correspondence system resulted in the loss of face-to-face contact and verbal communication between families and itinerant teachers, the education department and rural teachers adopted newly developing communications and transport technology in an attempt to maintain a service. During World War I, broadcast radio, for example, collaborated with the education department to "supplement learning by broadcasting programs of a general educative nature" (Higgins, 1994, p. 53).

Although the first school of the air was trialled in Alice Springs in 1949 (Fitzpatrick, 1982), it was not until 1960 that the school of the air first began transmitting in Cloncurry, Queensland. The schools of the air used the Royal Flying Doctor Service's radio network and a range of HF frequencies to enable families and teachers to maintain regular contact (Fowler, 1987; Higgins, 1994; Stevens, 1994). The number of schools of the air increased to three by 1966. However, as Higgins (1994, p. 55) explains, there continued to be discontinuities between teaching staff, educational programs and families because the school of the air teacher was independent of the correspondence teacher.

> In terms of curriculum and instruction, there was little educational congruence among Schools of the Air, the infrequent visits of the few remaining itinerants, and the lessons from the Brisbane Primary Correspondence School. Consequently, parents and students dealt with three separate curricula…

The families' concern with the lack of face-to-face contact, and having to experience three separate curricula, led to lobbying for an educational service which integrated distance learning approaches in a centralised location. In the 1980's, the distance learning approaches were amalgamated and the schools of the air and the correspondence schools became schools of distance education (Higgins, 1994). Distance education centres are now located in the Northern Territory and all states throughout Australia. There are currently seven distance education schools in the state of Queensland (The State of Queensland, Department of Education, 2002-2003).

Different combinations of e-mailed lessons, shared web space, internet lessons, telephone lessons, HF radio lessons, and hands-on lesson materials are offered by each school of distance education. Those provided depend on the communications systems and technologies available to students in their homes and the families' eligibility to access the services offered by each school. Some students are enrolled in distance education even though they live in proximity to an ordinary school. For example, students may be enrolled because medical circumstances prevent them from attending a nearby school. In some cases, home schooling is a choice. Some students receive approval to study via distance education because they are in alternative learning or residential institutions or for other special reasons (The State of Queensland, Department of Education, 2002-2003).

Overview of the Gorman School of Distance Education

Census results indicate that the population served by the Gorman School of Distance Education is predominantly white and includes adults with varying levels of socio-economic status and formal educational attainment (The Queensland Government, 2003). The majority of families own, manage or assist with the operations of an agricultural station. Many home tutors (maternal parents) have professional qualifications for nursing, teaching or other occupations. The school has been in operation for over 15 years and provides programs for students in Preschool through Year 10. This subsection describes the programs it offers and the technological, human, and resource support for these programs.

The Preschool program for children who are four years old and turning five in the year before Year 1 provides families with teacher prepared theme kits and booklets. Each kit is related to a specific topic and contains activity ideas for the home tutor, as well as learning resources such as musical instruments, art tools, poems, picture books, musical tapes and CDs, physical education equipment and games for all areas of the curriculum.

The elementary program for students in Years 1 to 7 provides two-week length units of study. Units on science and Studies of Society and Environment (SOSE) are presented alternately with ones on Language and Mathematics learning. The package for each unit includes a booklet developed to guide the home tutor (typically a parent or a hired governess) through the learning activities. The students also receive a book of activity sheets needed throughout each unit as well as their own booklet in which to complete the activities.

In the secondary program for students in Years 8 to 10, all students study four core subjects and may choose additional subjects as well. The number of secondary students is consistently small since most students attend boarding school in larger cities to complete their secondary schooling. After completing Year 10, students have the option of attending other schools of distance education that include Year 11 and Year 12.

Up until the last school term of 2004, students were "on-air" for 30 minutes with their class teacher at the Gorman School of Distance Education each school day. On-air lessons use the medium of a UHF radio. On November 29, 2004, the Gorman School of Distance Education ended its final UHF radio broadcast from any school of the air in Queensland, marking the end of an era with a full school assembly and Christmas concert. On this Monday morning, the Principal of the school concluded by using similar words to the teacher who broadcasted the first day of on air lessons in 1959. The principal said, "*It's a proud day for Education Queensland as we turn off the UHF Radio network and migrate across to telephone for scheduled lessons.*" It was then that the school captains and P & C President turned off the school's high-powered HF radio transmitters for the last time.

In the elementary years, a distance education teacher works with a maximum of 14 students and their families. A teacher with 14 students would have two lessons as having eight students is outlined by distance education school policy as a maximum number to effectively participate in an on-air/telephone lesson. For the remainder of their school day, students work with their home tutors. Students can participate in a variety of extra curricular activities that are offered in addition to the half hour school lesson each day. These lessons include clubs and other activities such as Project Club, Travel Buddy, Music, Cubs and Brownies.

"Telephone reading", a school-based program, involves all students in Years 1, 2 and 3 reading with their class teacher, support staff or teacher assistants. Depending on the students' reading ability, their support person may phone them from one to four times per week. Sets of levelled reading books are mailed to the students, and both the support person and student will have the book in front of them for each telephone reading session, which lasts approximately 15 minutes. Many students have head sets attached to their telephone, making their hands available for tracking the text and turning pages.

Telephone reading began at GSDE in 1995 when testing in the previous year highlighted that 30 percent of students in Year 3 and Year 6 were reading one year or more below the standard for their chronological age (The Gorman School of Distance Education Annual Report, 2001). The reading program has become increasingly available for beginning readers as parents and students indicate very high levels of support for the telephone reading program which has significantly improved the overall reading standards of the students and reduced the number of students in Year 4 to 10 requiring ongoing learning support programs (The Gorman School of Distance Education Annual Report, 1998). In 1995, six students began telephone reading. This increased to all boys in Year 1 in 1996, and to all students in Year 1 in 1997 (The Gorman School of Distance Education Annual Report, 2001).

The library at the Gorman School of Distance Education provides resources and support to meet the educational and recreational needs of all children, students, parents, home tutors, teachers and non-teaching staff. The library provides a wide range of resources, including books, videos, audiotapes, puzzles, games, construction, manipulatives and magazines. Also included in the collection of over 10 000 resources is a substantial parent and teacher reference section and a CD-ROM Club which operates out of the library. Generally, each individual library user may borrow forty resources for a period of up to six weeks.

The majority of families attend school-organized activities throughout the year. For example, distance education staff and families travel to major towns for “cluster”. Children who are in the same year level and live close to each other may join in together in their own area. Teaching staff travel to various towns to meet with the children and their families for a day of “school”. The number of clusters each group can attend is usually four per year. In addition, sports skills days and swim camps, track and field and swimming sports carnivals, and school camps all bring families and staff together in town venues. “Minischool” is held at the school and the children have a week of school with their classmates and school of distance education staff teacher. Activities are planned for the afternoon and evening. The students stay at the school in an accommodation unit. Parents or Home Tutors are asked to be supervisors at minischools. The school also hosts an open day in February at the beginning of the school year and graduation day in November. Home visits by the teacher to the student’s place of residence are also common.

Home tutors are involved in all forms of school-organized activities as well as school-based projects. The school has a very active and informed Parents and Citizens' Association, which conducts monthly meetings on-air. The school council is another avenue to strengthen school community partnerships. Made up of the school principal, the president of the Parents and Citizens' Association, four elected staff representatives and four elected parent representatives, the school council has responsibility for the endorsement of the Partnership Agreement, Annual Operational Plan, School Budget and School Planning Overview. A bi-annual, two-day home tutor workshop provides home tutors with training and assistance for the task of teaching their children at home. The workshop also provides the opportunity for home tutors to interact socially and share ideas with the whole school community. The home tutor workshop is planned by a dedicated group of home tutors and staff members from within the school community. To best address the needs and desires of the majority of the home tutors the committee surveys the school families. It is the information gained from the survey results that guides the committee when making decisions and planning.

Structure of the dissertation

The remainder of the dissertation begins with Chapter 2 presenting a number of ideas about *place*, one interpretive lens I use in thinking about and studying the experiences of three families enrolled in the Gorman School of Distance Education. As an emerging academic, open to new points of view expressed from both theoretical and practical perspectives, my inquiry was an excursion into a more informed knowing about the meaning of *place*, and a deeper understanding of the lens of *place* as an important theoretical conceptualisation for thinking about and studying experiences of distance education.

Next, in Chapter 3, I offer an overview of empirical research related to distance education in Australia. In Chapter 4 I relate the key conceptual underpinnings for the research and outline the conduct of the study.

Chapters 5, 6, and 7 present narrative portraits of each family. These include biographical information about the home tutors, narrative sketches of the children, and descriptive discussions of daily routines both within and outside of the schoolrooms used for the distance education programs. The home tutors' reflections and perspectives are foregrounded in these portraits.

Chapters 8, 9, and 10 present my interpretive accounts of the home tutors' and children's experience of distance education. Chapter 8 highlights overarching key dimensions of the home tutors' experience and underscores how everyday life on the properties gave rise to the mothers' definitions, motivations, roles and values (components of their identity) with consequences for everyday life in the schoolrooms. Chapter 9 contrasts the children's everyday lives inside of and outside of their schoolrooms by focusing on how they experienced or used the places available to them on their properties. Each place afforded different resources, rules, and available relationships. Chapter 10 provides an interpretive account to trace the dynamics of how everyday life evolved as it did in the families' schoolrooms. The identities of the mothers, the nature of the curriculum resources, and the rhythm of everyday life on the properties worked together to constrain the everyday life that was evolving in the schoolrooms.

Chapters 8, 9, and 10 work together to illustrate a number of the *place* ideas from Eyles (1989) and Ashcroft (2001). Everyday life on the properties was a backdrop of meaning for events or actions in the schoolrooms. The mothers' autobiographies and the values, motivations, roles, and ways of seeing and acting arising from their daily responsibilities in their families and on the properties contributed to their identities in ways that had consequences for how they shaped their everyday lives in the schoolrooms. The children's everyday life experiences in places on their properties outside of the schoolrooms supported values, motivations and roles that were often incongruous with rules and routines in the schoolrooms. The curriculum resources available to the home tutors were a considerable constraint on everyday life in the schoolrooms. The children's relationships with their mothers were very different inside of and outside of the schoolrooms. The relationships with their mothers that were available to them within the schoolrooms limited the everyday lives they could experience there.

In Chapter 11 I reflect on the research experience and revisit a number of specific findings in the study that have prompted me to think differently about families' experience of distance education. I consider the implications of these new insights for initiating conversations about possible improvements to distance education programs.

CHAPTER 2

PLACE: BEGINNINGS OF A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

I began this research with an interest in how home tutors working with their children and the Gorman School of Distance Education staff create and experience a "place for school learning" in their homes. In seeking a more informed and sophisticated understanding of this phenomenon, I anticipated drawing upon the conceptual ideas of *place* as one interpretive lens.

> *As I sat for a little while on the Michaelson's veranda this afternoon, I realized that in my weariness I am going to miss coming to this place, over 700 kilometres round trip from the Gorman School of Distance Education. In helping me to understand the meaning of this isolated place I wondered what exactly I would miss. It is the people and relationships I have with them. The animals too and the activities of riding on the back of the motorbike, reading to the students and being read to, going on picnics. This reminds me I noticed that the boys asked me to do fewer outside games with them. Perhaps it was because Timothy was not feeling well but I also think because of the heat. I have also come to feel familiar with the educational, familial and work routines in this place and how I can best blend in.* (Green, field notes, October 18th 2004)

Scholars from many disciplines, including cultural geography, sociology, philosophy, psychology, education, and environmental studies, have elucidated the significance of using *place* as a fundamental idea in researching human experience. Writing the following section has helped me to pull together a number of ideas and understandings about *place* as a concept. I have drawn upon common elements in place literature to clarify a number of ideas about place: how space becomes place; how people and places are mutually transformative; dimensions or attributes of the meaning of places; children and place attachment; and place as a significant medium through which human identity is created.

Space which has meaning: place

Space has been described as three-dimensional, a physical form representing both geographical and spatial features (Caragata, 1998), a part of an environment, a context or undifferentiated landscape (Lippard, 1997), being manifested in such formations as nations, cities, neighbourhoods, institutions and bodies (Helfenbein, 2004), or as an abstract name for a multifaceted and complicated set of ideas (Tuan, 1977). In contrast with the abstract physicality of space, place is the result of experiences "from the inside, the resonance of a specific location that is known and familiar" (Lippard, 1997, p. 7). Place is lived, constructed, interpreted, conceived or imagined through habitual human activity (Brey, 1998), through the ways in which people inhabit space (Ashcroft, 2001), and through coming to know it better through lived experiences (Tuan, 1977). More specifically, Seamon (1979, p. 143) discusses the phenomenon of routine physical interactions within an environment:

> The groundstone of place ballet is the coming together of people's time-space routines and body ballets in terms of space. Additional, less regular participants may be drawn to place ballet, but its crux is the prereflective bodily regularity of routine users.

Most importantly, place is about meaning. Relph (1976) expresses the idea that a given physical locality becomes *place* when human consciousness creates and attaches meaning to it. Similarly, humanistic geographers such as Tuan (1977), and environmental psychologists such as Heft (1988), explain that as one gradually experiences a space, certain meanings are attributed to it and certain values are endowed upon it. Helfenbein (2004) also states that the transformation from space to *place* results from humans investing meaning in the space they spend time in. He writes, "space, constructed through discursive, interpretive, lived, and imagined practices, becomes place." Williams (1995) also argues that meanings are not just situated or distributed in space but in fact define and create place.

People and places as mutually transformative

Place is continually and dynamically formed from, and out of, the process of spending time in it. People and a place dynamically define and transform each other over time (Williams, 1995). For example, Basso (1996) insists that as much as we are part of places, places are also a part of us.

In asking, how does where we are help make us who we are, and how does who we are help make where we are?, Helfenbein (2004) resonates with Ashcroft's (2001) premise that place is the woven web of language, memory and cultural practice, a discourse in process bound up with the culture and identity of its inhabitants. Similarly, Relph (1993, p. 36) states, "a place is above all a territory of meanings. These meanings are created both by what one receives from and by what one gives to a particular environmental context". Lippard (1997, p. 9) too, expresses that, "our personal relationships to history and place form us, as individuals and groups, and in reciprocal ways we form them." Gibson (1991) explains that the physical space and the social environment coexist and jointly contribute to the meaning and nature of events. Summarizing Gibson's theory, Clark and Uzzell (2002, p. 95-96) state:

> The affordances of an object or environment do not change as the needs of the observer change. Instead, it is up to the observer to perceive the affordances of an object or environment according to his/her needs at the time. Thus, the relationship between the observer and the environment is reciprocal; perception guides action in the environment and this action provides information for perception. The observer obtains knowledge of the environment and this knowledge guides action; the

> environment will support the action as knowledge was derived from the environment.

Canter (1977) also writes of the constructed nature of a place and recognizes that inhabitants cannot be separated from their affective responses to places. Because of this, places are in a constant state of flux and construction.

Dimensions or attributes of the meaning of places

A number of scholars have worked to clarify the dimensions or attributes of places that distinguish the ways in which they are experienced. I discuss some of these here to illustrate the variety of analytic tools and insights that have been developed. Fournier (1991), for example, identified three categories of attributes for places: *tangibility, commonality,* and *emotionality*. Canter (1977), as another example, recommends that any characterization of place refer to *physical attributes, activities,* and *conceptions*—the three dimensions of place he believes are responsible for meanings and associations. Stokols and Shumaker (1981, cited in Williams, 1995) suggest that the meanings associated with a place are related to *content, structure* (e.g. complexity or diversity), *clarity* and *consistency.* To explain how some places work well or do not, Seamon (1979, p. 141-151) uses the following six criteria as analytic tools: attraction, diversity, comfortableness, distinctiveness, invitation and attachment.

Perhaps some of the most intriguing aspects of places have to do with their emotional or symbolic meanings and associations. Fournier's (1991, p. 738) term, *tangibility*, for example, refers to the extent to which "meaning is primarily objective, tangible, and verifiable through the senses or whether it is primarily subjective, interpreted through experience and dependent on associations". As Williams (1995) notes, Gibson's (1950) description of a continuum of meaning from concrete to abstract is similar to Fournier's ideas about tangibility. Concrete meanings refer to functionality, that is, the manner in which an object or place is used. "By contrast abstract meanings tend to be symbolic. The symbolic meanings carried by some object or place may be assigned to it by a culture, social group or an individual" (Williams, 1995, p. 10). Giddens' (1991) sociological perspective, for example, assigns more prominence to symbolic meanings such as describing place as "home" or as a site of companionship. These meanings are structured socially or are learned interpretations of objects, events, or places (Williams, 1995). The sociocultural perspective values built or natural environments not only for instrumental intentions, but also as places that people become attracted to and even attached to because they hold emotional, symbolic, and spiritual meaning (Williams, 1995). Reviews by Ellis (2002, 2003, 2004) also underscore that place is a source of security, comfort, stability, nurturance, belonging, meaning and identity.

Tuan (1974, cited in Williams, 1995) believes that the emotionality dimension of place varies in intensity from instantaneous sensory pleasure to enduring and deeply rooted attachment. Similar to Fournier's emotional characteristic, such as feelings and moods associated with experience of a place, Gussow (1971) describes the emotional or affective bonds which transform a space to a place as "the process of experiencing deeply. A place is the piece of the whole environment that has been claimed by feelings" (cited in Relph, 1976, p. 141-142). Williams (1995, p. 11) considers emotionality to be "an indication of the depth or extent of meaning with symbolic and spiritual meanings often associated with high levels of attachment to an object or place".

While Tuan (1974), Gussow (1971) and Williams (1995) discuss the depth of emotional attachment, Hay (1988) draws attention to the amount of time spent in a place as contributing to a "sense of place." Hay explains that a personal connection results from both the duration of residence and community involvement.

> The collage of memories and meanings perceived over time forms a gestalt, a whole that represents one's life in a place. A sense of place helps to order that whole, giving one a locus, a place from which to feel the Earth and be connected to it. (p. 163)

Rivlin (1990), too, asserts that the bonds that develop between people and places take time and contribute to a sense of stability, caring and concern for a setting. Derr (2002, p. 125) defines sense of place as "a relationship to place, a dialectical way of thinking of and experiencing a biophysical and cultural place." Lippard (1997 p. 33) reports that the last twenty years have seen much written about sense of place, which she defines as "a virtual immersion that depends on lived experience and a topographical intimacy that is rare today both in ordinary life and in traditional educational fields."

Sense of place or place attachment may or may not be held at a conscious level of awareness (Hay, 1988). Studies by Fried (1963) and Stokols and Shumaker (1982) demonstrated that when people are forced to leave familiar residential places they can experience grief reactions. Along with the phenomenological approach to place, these relocation studies contributed to an understanding of place attachment. Basso (1996) observes that it is not until people are separated from significant places that awareness of sense of place may assert itself in pressing and powerful ways.

Children and place attachment

As a way of defining children's place attachment, Chawla (1992, p. 64) suggests that

> children are attached to a place when they show happiness at being in it and regret or distress at leaving it, and when they value it not only for the satisfaction of physical needs but for its own intrinsic qualities.

In her broadly based 1992 review of literature related to children's place attachment—the first one ever undertaken—Chawla concluded that children's favourite places were those that afforded *security, social affiliation, and opportunities for creative expression and exploration.* Her review emphasized children's appreciation of undefined space---places that were free from adult authority, not specifically planned for children, and malleable both physically and imaginatively. These spaces were typically natural environments, undeveloped waste spaces, or small leftover spaces in the home or outdoors. Such spaces gave children the opportunity to create their own worlds and find themselves in these.

> At every age there is a need for undefined space where young people can formulate their own worlds: for free space where preschoolers can manipulate the environment and play 'let's pretend' in middle childhood demands; for hideouts and play-houses indoors and out where school-age children can practice independence; and for public hangouts and private refuges where adolescents can test new social relationships and ideas. (Chawla, 1992, p. 69)

Chawla also noted that children also cherish private places such as their own room or other hideouts that can serve as a refuge or a place where they can simply be alone. Similarly, in Sobel's (1990) research with adults about their childhood memories and with children about their favourite places, he also concluded that making and having a special place gives power to children, supporting a sense of self and their belief that they can influence their own thoughts and behaviour.

In a more recent review, Langhout (2003) similarly concluded that there are consistent findings from children and *place* research that *autonomy*, *social support*, and *positive feelings* are associated with children's place attachment or sense of place. She used these ideas as an interpretive framework for her case study of a child's experience at school.

Ellis (In press) distinguishes between "sense of place" and "place attachment." Writing about children's experience in classrooms, she states:

> If their experiences in these places are filled with familiar routines that build their confidence, if they know and become known by others, acquire intimate local knowledge, and learn the norms of the culture, then sense of place may be well established. However, be it positive or negative in nature, the classroom and school will acquire an emotional significance for them.

Ellis (In press) reiterates Hay's (1988) argument that *sense of place* will develop with time, but *place attachment* typically depends upon affiliation with like-minded inhabitants. Relph (1976, p. 141) explains that, "Indeed our relationships with places are just as necessary, varied, and sometimes perhaps just as unpleasant, as our relationships with other people." It is only when a place holds a positive emotional significance for a child that one can conclude that there is place attachment rather than just the establishment of sense of place.

Discussion

In this chapter I have outlined some of the ideas that have broadened my understanding of place as a concept. This was a general starting point for me before focusing in on the key ideas from Eyles (1989) and Ashcroft (2001) which I presented in the "conceptual framework for the study" in Chapter 1 and which I discuss in Chapter 4 in the section on "conceptual underpinnings for the study."

The preceding synthesis offers an understanding of *place* as space which has meaning. *Place* is both a human conception and a social construction. It is the experiences, activities, routines and interactions (or ways of inhabiting a space) to which individuals or groups assign meaning, thereby creating and defining a place. There exists a reciprocal relationship between people and places because the inhabitants of a place do not exist independently of that place.

Meaning is a key attribute of place and this has often been discussed within the topic of sense of place. Interest in children's experience of place has given rise to understandings about children's place attachment and the ways in which places can be satisfying to children.

Additional key ideas about place that have been most useful for me in thinking about and studying the experiences of three families enrolled in the Gorman School of Distance Education are elaborated in Chapter 4 where place is discussed as an interpretive framework for this inquiry.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH ON DISTANCE EDUCATION IN AUSTRALIA

Much of the research on distance education in Australia has been concerned with innovations in technology or curriculum. Some attention has been given to home tutors—their roles, effectiveness and professional development. Overall, the trend in most reports reveals a tendency to treat home tutors as deficit and to not value their knowledge and experience. New curricula tend to be planned on the basis of inference and philosophical frameworks external to the distance education families. The nature of the curricula being delivered by new technologies tends not to be questioned.

Sites of teaching and learning in distance education

In educational journals, technology journals and bulletins, I read many articles written by trained staff willing to share their experiences of teaching at a school of distance education and detailing the daily tasks of providing an educational service to students and families in remote areas. However, there has been very little inquiry into the families' day-to-day experiences of teaching and learning at home and their perspectives on distance education programs.

Showing interest in the nature of the home education environment for distance education, Tomlinson, Coulter and Peacock (1985) studied 36 families enrolled in distance education. They concluded that it was possible to identify four distinct situations of teaching and learning - the “urban,” “modified urban,” “integrated,” and “solitary learner” classroom context. The “urban” teaching and learning context was characterized by a schoolroom separate from the families' home, regular school hours and the presence of the home tutor at all times. At the other end of the continuum constructed by Tomlinson, Coulter and Peacock, the "solitary learner" teaching and learning context was described only in terms of the lack of supervision by adults in assisting their child/ren in completing their school work. The researchers discuss each of the teaching and learning categories observed in relation to how people, place and time are organised in comparison to learning contexts in traditional schools.

Tomlinson, Coulter and Peacock (1985) also inquired into families' views on whether organized school events such as school camps, home tutor seminars, minischools and school days in major towns, as well as non-school activities such as shearing and planned family holidays "interrupted" educational routines and completion of work. The Interview Schedule used by the researchers in the data collection focused on asking for descriptions of what "interrupts" the families' educational routines. For example, the home tutors were asked, "what regular activities in the SOTA (School of the Air) calendar (e.g. camps, clusters) interrupt your school work?" I wondered why the researchers chose to interpret and present school-planned events as interruptions, rather than as integrated learning experiences within the distance education program. I wondered why some home tutors in their study viewed school-planned events as an add-on to the routine of completing the correspondence work, rather than as integrated learning experiences within the distance education program.

I have not located any inquiries into how families experience attending organized school events such as school camps, minischools and school days in major towns. One somewhat related study focused a small amount of time and attention on the students' language and literacy involvement on such days (Louden & Rivalland, 1995). I would be interested to know how families who do choose to attend these school-based and school-planned events experience these days. Further, learning why families choose not to attend might inform planning for these events. Gaining an understanding of why families choose to attend, or not, could also provide insight into the nature of the community in distance education.

Curriculum improvement projects and research

Some of the Australian distance education research literature has focused on novel curriculum programs or curriculum improvement. These seem to be based on philosophies, judgments and ideas that have been formed without direct investigation into the daily teaching and learning experiences of home tutors and their children. Eisner (1998, p. 11), for one, has critiqued such an approach.

> It does not seem particularly revolutionary to say that it is important to try to understand how teachers and classrooms function before handing out recommendations for change. Yet so much of what is suggested to teachers and school administrators is said independent of context and often by those ignorant of the practices they wish to improve.

Similarly, when Harley (1985, p.161) investigated an alternative organizational model for early childhood distance education programs she commented, "One of the fundamental errors made by administrators and program planners is their continual attempt to superimpose the world of the school or the centre-based structure on that of the home-based setting." Many of the programs reported in the research literature were no longer operating when I was teaching at the Gorman School of Distance Education. I presume the programs were discontinued or replaced.

Mallan's (1986) curriculum innovation, Project SARA, based on storytelling is an example of a curriculum project in distance education in Australia that has been discontinued or replaced. To develop Project SARA, Mallan travelled to North America and spent 11 weeks taking a storytelling course to provide her with new knowledge and resources regarding the processes and practices of storytelling with children. Based on a theoretical framework which guided and shaped all stages of the project, Project SARA's purpose was

> to enhance the oral language skills and confidence of children and to explore ways that storytelling can be used to assist in this development. It [was] also designed to provide another important link between home and school with parents/home tutors, teachers and children actively involved in sharing stories and a range of other forms of spoken communication. (Mallan, 1986, p. 1)

I wonder if Mallan had also spent 11 weeks with home tutors, staff and students, whether the features of the storytelling program might have been modified to better suit the everyday realities and routines of the home tutors and children.

More recently, plans were being developed for curriculum innovations related to literacy and numeracy. In personal communication with Shelley Dole (June 17, 2003), I was informed that, "students in rural and remote areas do not achieve as well on literacy and numeracy measures as urban counterparts." Dole is the project manager of a two-year DEST (Department of Education, Science and Training) project to investigate improving literacy and numeracy outcomes of distance education students in the early years of schooling.

> For this project, we are to find out about difficulties experienced by home tutors in promoting literacy and numeracy, the support structures from their schools of distance education, the types of PD undertaken by home tutors in literacy and numeracy, the use of ICT in promoting literacy and numeracy in the early years, and innovations and good practice in using ICT to promote literacy and

> numeracy. From the information sheet, you would have gathered that we are putting together a resource for home tutors and teachers for promoting literacy and numeracy and using ICT. (Shelley Dole, personal communication, June 17, 2003)

It is likely that this project will focus on changing the practices of home tutors and such plans will be developed from inferences more so than from real-life understanding of the experiences of home tutors and children. Canning (1992, p. 61) criticizes such approaches stating that she knows

> no other way to discover these meanings than by asking those who experience some phenomenon of interest to tell about it in their own words. To stay at a distance with methods that rely solely on inference from observations and/or indirect questions designed by researchers to tap some concept they conceive it to be perceived by so-called 'subjects' is to delay any real-life understanding that can inform decisions made by and for the real people in the schools who will, or will not, after all, achieve 'school improvement'.

In a study of how teachers and many governesses and parents feel about drama and visual arts in distance education, Duncam and Cassidy (1994) did demonstrate an attempt to understand real-life experience. They learned that home tutors believed that it was "their own lack of skills in the arts which prevented their children receiving a better arts education" (Duncam & Cassidy, 1994, p. 27). Many respondents in the study suggested that assistance be provided through handbooks, videos, workshops and on-air lessons. I did not receive a response from the authors to my questions about whether the data collected from the home tutors in their study informed any future decision-making regarding the arts curriculum for distance education or the teaching practices of staff working at schools of distance education. I continue to wonder how curriculum development and curriculum change in distance education can be influenced.

The parent as home tutor

Although home tutors are teachers, “crucial to the school’s existence, the child’s education” (Fitzpatrick, 1982, p. 189), research on their roles reveals mixed or conflicting opinions and beliefs. I wonder if this is in part because some may view home tutors as curriculum implementers, and teaching as the process of adhering to objectives, lesson plans and assessment strategies.

In research with the teaching staff at the Carnarvon School of the Air in Western Australia, Fitzpatrick (1982) used data from informal discussions and formal interviews to learn teachers’ views on the effectiveness of home tutors and their importance in the educational process. He noted:

> At one pole is the view that the mother is ‘the deciding factor as to how successful the student will be’; the other is that the mothers are simply ‘too close to their children to teach’. As to the mother’s ability, it is accepted by all that it varies considerably. Some teachers feel that some mothers ‘think they know more than they do’ about educational matters; they the teachers recognise that other mothers know a lot, particularly about school of the air teaching. (p. 195)

Similarly, when Taylor (1985) conducted a study to evaluate alternative strategies for improving the delivery of services to geographically isolated children, it was also found that the home tutors’ role was confusing and contentious among parents, teachers, and administrators. Harley (1985, p. 164) found that the home tutors in her inquiries “strongly support the view that they are the main facilitators and educators of their children at both the primary and preschool levels.” More recently, Boylan and Squires (1996), in their extensive literature review on home tutors concluded that, in the education of the child, the home tutor has a central or pivotal role to play, while the roles expected of them are complex and varied.

Louden and Rivalland (1995) conducted intensive case study research to examine the roles of home tutors. They used audio-taped, semi-structured interviews with home-tutors and students and audio-taped recordings of students as they completed their school work in a range of contexts including lessons in pastoral station school rooms, school camps, visits to the distance education centre, and on-air lessons. They also used audio diaries collected by students in the period after home visits and written field notes made by the researchers on the basis of their observations of students' distance learning. Drawing from this data, they attempted to describe and categorise the home tutors' experiences in educating their child/ren by giving an account of the range of "supervision" roles adopted by home tutors. They identified and outlined five home tutor roles as supervisor, teacher, mentor, co-learner and parent.

> Home tutors working in the *supervisor* role focused on completion of the task. Home tutors in the *teacher* role confidently assumed that they knew what the student ought to learn from the text. In the *mentor* role, home tutors focused on keeping the learning relationship between themselves and the student alive. Home tutors in the *co-learner* role, in contrast, immersed themselves in the learning problems faced by the student. In the *parent* role, home tutors combined their existing role as a member of the family with their distance education role as a home tutor. (Chapter 1)

In doing their research in this way, Louden and Rivalland have shown what it can look like to take more seriously the central or pivotal role of home tutors and the importance of understanding the relationships between home tutors and their children.

Home tutors' pedagogical knowledge

The sources of home tutors' pedagogical beliefs and practices have also been of interest in research. As John Gardner highlights, we teach who we are (Feeney, Christensen & Moravcik, 2001).

As one example, Knowles (1988, 1998, 2001) used autobiographical writing and oral history interviews with home educating parents in North America to learn their sources of teacher role identity. In doing so, he asked home tutors to reconstruct a range of constitutive events in their past family, school, friends and work experience that shape their participation in the distance education program in the context of their lives. Four sources of teacher role identity emerged from personal histories written or recorded by home educators--childhood experiences of family, teacher role models, memories of school, and the impact of significant others or significant experiences. Tomlinson, Coulter and Peacock (1985, p. 30) also found that "parents bring with them conceptions of classrooms which relate back to their own primary school experience," suggesting that, as well as being guided by the distance education curriculum, home tutors are also working within their own experiential framework.

The home tutors' relationship with their children – as mother and also as a "school" teacher – is very interesting to me. Does the home tutors' natural nurturing and teacher role extend into the schoolroom? How do the students perceive the home tutors roles? How do the children experience the two relationships? How are relationships between home tutors and children negotiated or re-worked in this school learning place? How could students inform the educational insights of both professional educators and home-educating parents on the distance education landscape (Mayberry, et al, 1995)? What parts of themselves do the home tutors bring to the school learning environment with their children? Do they leave attributes of their multiplicity outside of the classroom door? Although these were not the focus questions of my research, they were questions that hung in my awareness throughout the study.

Professional development for home tutors

On the basis of their research with 36 families enrolled in four schools of distance education across three states in Australia, Tomlinson, Coulter and Peacock (1985) noted that the developmental and pedagogical needs of the home tutors are largely ignored. A little over a decade later, Boyles and Squires (1996, p. 1) stated that "the home tutor plays a central intermediary between the distance education teacher and the child," and called for training and support for the home tutor "in this essential education role." In 2000, such direction was supported by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission which recognised that because of

> the vital role played by the home supervisor/tutors, each education department should ensure that they are funded to access professional development once a year. Ideally this professional development would be offered in conjunction with residential weeks provided for children learning by distance. (p. 43)

A number of programs and professional development opportunities have been offered to support and "train" home tutors. As one example, Boylan (1996, p.2) reports on the development of a home tutor support program at the Broken Hill School of the Air. The nature and content of the program was developed through consultation with 18 home tutors, with the program identifying two major objectives – to assist in the development "of a common language and set of concepts with which [home tutors] can describe, explain and understand the philosophies of instruction" and "to provide tangible recognition of the skills acquired by home tutors in distance education by giving them a formal qualification." After home tutors completed the first module on Child Development, English K-6, Managing Learning and Mathematics K-6, the participating home tutors and the principal were interviewed over the telephone to gain a progress report of the program. In summary, Boylan (1996, p. 8) reported that the formative feedback from the home tutors and the principal

> indicated that the program is meeting the needs of the participants, they have found the content within the modules has been relevant and directly applicable to what they do in the classroom and had assisted in understanding why their child(ren) behave they way they do. This has produced a new level of self-confidence in the home tutors and their ability to successfully teach their child. The home tutors have made constructive suggestions on the organisation of the modules which will be included in still to be developed modules.

In spite of this success, this program has been discontinued. Personal communication with Boylan (October 19, 2003) revealed that costs were seen as a disadvantage.

In reading the overview of this professional development program and the reactions of the home tutors, I noticed that two thirds of the home tutors only wanted to receive the materials, rather than complete the assignment for each module, or were not seeking formal recognition for completion of the course. I emailed Boylan and asked if he sought clarification as to why two thirds of the home tutors only wanted to receive the materials or were not seeking formal recognition for completion of the course. He replied that he did, informally and anecdotally. He learned that the home tutors did not have enough time and/or they felt that they were unable to complete the responses to the set tasks that were required as part of each of the ten modules in the program (personal communication, October 13, 2003).

Discussions of professional development for home tutors tend to be in terms of training home tutors/supervisors in classroom skills. There is little recognition that home tutors have important knowledge to bring to conversations about distance education. For example, I am intrigued by the statements used by Boylan (1996, p. 8) to discuss the findings from the first evaluation. There appears to be a tendency to view the home tutor as an object of action and as deficient. For example, phrases such as "the 'gap' between the skills and knowledge of the trained distance education teachers and those of home tutors", "they require a good deal of additional support in order to better understand basic teaching principles and practices", "the school has, in the past, been assuming too high a level of common ground on issues such as pedagogy, principles of curriculum design and educational philosophy." Similarly, the aim of a series of workshops at the Katherine School of the Air's (KSA) home-tutor conference for parents and teachers is to provide support and information to further develop the skills of the home tutor (Whitting & Boyd, 2000).

Whitting and Boyd (2000, p. 54) asserted that "parents who have educated their children through School of the Air have a wealth of information and experiences to share with other parents and us teachers." There is, however, little evidence that home tutors' knowledge and experience about teaching and learning is seen as having value to inform curriculum revisions, technological implementations or school wide practices.

Research on technologies for learning

A great deal of research on distance education and technology describes and evaluates the effectiveness of new programs or technologies being developed in distance education centres (Boylan, Wallace & Richmond, 2000; Halse, 1985; Leadbetter, 1998; Vivian, 1986; Whitmount, 1992). The continual growth in technology has opened avenues for trial, experimentation, and evaluation (Vivian, 1986). Many inquiries took place during the trial phase of a technology's introduction.

Although data has been collected from teachers, home tutors and students, the focus of much technology related research has been administrative, with the implicit assumption that these technologies are valuable tools for enhancing the quality of teaching and learning. For example, Vivian (1986) evaluated the costs of delivery and return of learning materials by surface mail and electronic mail and the different organizational structures that electronic mail demand at the school level. Leadbetter (1998) evaluated the use of computer-based interactive audiographic technology as a means of delivering lessons to distance education. Access (ease and equity), immediacy of feedback from teaching staff, student outcomes, costs, technical issues, corporate culture, time and workload constraints were evaluated in this study. Boylan, Wallace and Richmond (2000) provide an overview of research on the use of technology and learning, including satellite based delivery systems for teaching and learning. In summarizing the advantages and disadvantages for satellite based delivery systems, they reveal the general focus on cost, time, quality of access, adequacy of teacher training and suitability of the technology.

Taylor (1985) argued that the importance of inquiring into the families' experiences of using the technology and programs in their home settings had been overlooked in much research on technology in distance education. Since 1985, several studies have been attempted to examine the day-to-day experience of a new form of technology (e.g., Finger & Rotolo, 2001; Louden & Rivalland, 1995; Mountford, et al, 1986; Vivian, 1986). These studies focused on questions such as the role of technology in supplementing the print-and-post based distance learning texts, providing a social context for physically isolated students' learning, supporting teaching strategies and interactions, and facilitating a constructivist teaching and learning philosophy.

The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (2000) has reported on shortcomings of new technology being introduced in distance education. The Commission's reports included home tutors' accounts of problems with the availability of power and use of computer technology. Louden and Rivalland (1995) describe similar difficulties. For example, no guarantee of constant power supply or the risks of over-power and under-power surges make the use of computer technology difficult. Also discouraging is the seven dollars per hour cost of the Internet and the 4 times as long download time compared to the city. Louden and Rivalland also reported that, although an increasingly wide range of technology is available to supplement printed materials, the home tutors' preoccupation with having their students complete and submit curriculum units leads them to under-use resources that are not integrated into each unit of work. Such technology includes interactive television, computers, and videos. Louden and Rivalland also noted that technology innovations tended to reproduce the same text forms as the written texts students were already using. Further, these were made less effective than they otherwise might have been by inexperience, patterns of power availability on pastoral stations, and incomplete sets of equipment.

In distance education research and development, there has been enthusiasm for the promise of solar power for computers (Louden & Rivalland, 1995) and computer based satellite systems (Boylan & Wallace, 1999). The latter can provide live, interactive educational experiences "for the most geographically isolated primary school students in the state" (Boylan & Wallace, 1999, p. 4).

Research on technology in distance education has tended to focus on how technology enhances the educational programs already in place. In studies by Louden and Rivalland (1995) and others it was found that home tutors tended to view new technology as an additional requirement to the current curriculum materials. Louden and Rivalland recommended that as new forms of technology are introduced, they should be integrated into the printed resources. Boylan and Wallace's (1999, p. 67) trial attempted to do this. They stated, "Effectively, this view reflected a fundamental change in attitude about the use of the satellite technology compared to the pre-existing radio technology…where the 'on-air' lessons appear to be dominated by the provision of socialising experiences for the children…"

I see opportunities not only for governments and education systems to support helpful technology, but also for families to first share their perspectives and understandings of the already given curriculum. I wonder how children experience the "school learning place" that results from the blending of the virtual/technological and the physical and face-to-face? I wonder if families' experiences with sometimes limited access to Internet Service Providers, higher telephone costs and very slow Internet access speed contribute to stronger feelings of connection or the frustration of isolation (Fitzpatrick, 1982)? And I wonder how the need to learn knowledge and skills related to the introduction of new technology affects the home tutors' and students' experience of schooling routines and their relationship to an aging distance education curriculum? As Fitzpatrick (1982) once asked, does technology eliminate isolation or simply alter its nature? These questions were not the focus of my research but they were wonderings that sensitized my perceptions of the complexity of families' experience of distance education.

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

In this research I conducted qualitative case studies of the distance education experience of three families in Western Queensland, Australia during Term 3 of the academic year in 2004. Merriam (1988, p. 6) explains that qualitative case study research, with an interpretive emphasis, allows for the selection of a small, informative sample to discover what "it means for participants to be in that setting, what their lives are like, what's going on for them, what their meanings are, what the world looks like in that particular setting." During a period of five months, I spent 12 days with each family. Each day I spent with the families provided the opportunity to not only observe their distance education experience but to also participate in their everyday lives. This was an important aspect of the study since the at-home distance education activities were not isolated events but were interconnected with communities and with the social and physical contexts and routines of the families' everyday lives. This chapter presents key conceptual underpinnings for the research and an outline of the conduct of the study.

Theoretical underpinnings of the research

In my conduct of the study, I drew upon the conceptual frameworks of interpretive inquiry, *place*, and "curriculum-as-lived." Each of these is discussed in turn in the sub-sections below.

Interpretive Inquiry within the constructivist paradigm

I understand this research as an interpretive inquiry informed by key ideas from hermeneutics and situated within the constructivist paradigm. Guba and Lincoln (1994) explain that the ontology of the constructivist paradigm recognises that multiple constructions of meaning co-exist and that inquirers' and participant's constructions of content and meaning are subject to continuous revision. They argue that the purpose of inquiry in the constructivist paradigm is to develop understandings that are more informed and sophisticated than those previously held. Epistemologically, this paradigm views the inquirer as positioned in the role of participant and facilitator, interactively linked with participants so that findings are created as the inquiry unfolds. Methodologically, in this paradigm, inquirers' and participants' understandings are elicited and refined through their interactions with each other.

Guba and Lincoln (1994) acknowledge that inquiry in the constructivist paradigm is necessarily hermeneutical. Key ideas and principles from philosophical hermeneutics can inform understanding of the researcher's process in interpretive inquiry (Ellis, 1998; Gadamer, 1998; Jardine, 1998, Jardine, 2000; Smith, 1991; Smith, 1993; Smith, 2002). A key premise in philosophical hermeneutics is that knowledge or interpretation is actively constructed as opposed to found or discovered as a truth or single reality. The data collection activities involved perceiving the everyday lives of the families and, as Gadamer (1998) states, perception is interpretation. The data produced through the observation and interviewing activities were the first level of interpretive material from which further interpretation and analysis could proceed. To develop more adequate interpretations, Smith (1991, 2002) explains that it is helpful for researchers to be mindful of three themes that have been central in hermeneutics since Schleiermacher's nineteenth century work.

The first theme pertains to interpretation and understanding being a creative activity. This means that my role as an inquirer involves working holistically rather than reductively and using everything that I know to inform interpretation. Working holistically requires moving away from a "categories first" approach and being willing to consider a phenomenon in its full complexity (Ellis, 1998).

The second theme is concerned with the need to be attentive to part/whole relationships and micro and macro contexts. My reflections during the inquiry involved a constant movement between the specific and the general and an awareness of contexts within contexts to show relations between events and people. The projective forward arc and the evaluative backward arc of the hermeneutic circle reflect the search for part/whole relationships when interrogating one's initial interpretations.

The third theme highlights the pivotal role of language and history in interpretation and understanding. As a researcher I needed to be attentive to the language used by the participants and by myself and to recognize that we were working towards a more shared meaning for the language that we used together. It was important to recognize that language affects self-understanding by encouraging or constraining how a person creates and mediates meaning (Smith, 1991). I brought a variety of personal and professional experiences and discourses to the inquiry. "What we come to see depends upon what we seek, and what we seek depends, as Gombrich has pointed out, on what we know how to say" (Eisner, 1998, p. 46).

As I began my inquiry journey, I took with me the belief that there are multiple, constructed realities that are different for every individual. I was not looking for one single true interpretation that could be sought and held onto to. Rather, I believe that all knowledge is context-bound, causes are not distinguishable from events. I took up my research as an effort to understand the meanings the families have constructed and the contexts that gave rise to these constructed realities.

Using the constructivist paradigm's transactional/subjectivist assumption (Guba & Lincoln, 1994), I saw knowledge as being created within the dialogical relationships developed between the families and myself. Gadamer (1998) highlights that knowledge is actively constructed and produced, not found. I was aware of the importance of the quality of the relationship I had with each participant. If I was to access their perspectives, they needed to see my presence, commitment and openness (Weber, 1986) in wanting to make sense of their experiences, thoughts and feelings with them. I consciously worked toward gaining the participants' trust by relating to them with genuine interest. Knowledge creation could be understood as a "learning process involving dialogue between researchers and researched--a dialogue which is always ongoing and incomplete" (Scott & Usher, 1999, p. 29). My inquiry was a learning process in which my partial understandings of distance education became played out and harmonized with each family's interpretations and understandings of their experience, and which Gadamer calls a "fusion of horizons" (Gadamer, 1994; discussed in Scott & Usher, 1999, p. 29).

> Because it is situated, every horizon is inevitably limited, but it is also open to connecting with other horizons (perspectives, standpoints). The resulting fusion is an enlargement or broadening of one's own horizon which leaves open the

> possibility for continual reinterpretation and different meanings as horizons move and change…Through the comparing and contrasting of various interpretations, a consensus can be achieved despite differences, indeed *because* of differences.

As an interpretive inquirer, I assumed a hermeneutic/ dialectic role in constructing and reconstructing social experiences and realities in cooperation and collaboration with the families (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). "It is through the seeing of that which is neither only *you* or *I* but is rather *our* between that we learn about each other" (Merriam, 1998, p. 4).

I have to acknowledge that the effort to fuse horizons without becoming overwhelmed required a great deal of navigation or selection. It was not my intention to take each event, issue or conversation I encountered along the way and explore it in depth. Rather, as Frost (2001) suggests, as I completed each data collection activity I asked questions such as: What's important about this? What does it make me think about? Is this path worth the merit of continuing further? There were many occurrences where I needed to, or chose to, leave a "wondering" unexplored.

At the start of my inquiry I reflected on my own pre-understandings of the families' experience. I began in full awareness that my understanding was incomplete and always moving forward. Using an understanding of interpretive inquiry to guide the journey as it unfolded, I valued multiple stories and meanings, not as records of what happened but as drafts of my own and the families' interpretive search for connections (Ellis, 1998). I find the term "uncovering"—coming to see what was not seen before (Ellis, 1998)--to be very powerful as I think about my path in understanding and reconstructing the experiences of three families enrolled in the Gorman School of Distance Education. My role as inquirer involved the active construction of knowledge, not only to understand what the families did, but also to understand what it is like for them to be enrolled in distance education, and to understand what their everyday lives and practices mean to them.

Place as an interpretive framework

Eyles (1989) has discussed the significance of the structural formations of place--rules, resources, available relationships--for constraining everyday life, and in turn, for identities that are created and re-created through actions in everyday life. He notes that as the routines of everyday life in a place take shape, this also becomes a structure that limits or constrains the everyday lives people can individually shape for themselves. Eyles writes that although people do shape their own everyday lives, they do not necessarily do so with materials of their own choosing. In the following recollections of my everyday life in the place of my childhood, I recognize the way my experiences were enabled by the nature of rules, resources, and available relationships. Many of the "learnings" I identify were aspects of the identity I was constructing through my activities in everyday life.

> *I was a little girl growing up in a close-knit neighbourhood. From my perspective as a child, each family was the same and all the children belonged together in this neighbourhood as friends. I realize now, from an adult's perspective, that our families were different. Some fathers were labourers or construction workers; one father was a doctor, one a pharmacist, some of our mothers worked, while most mothers stayed at home and worked. There was a reason why our friends next door didn't receive presents at Christmas or chocolate at Easter. We asked why, received our answer and went on with our childhoods and friendships together. There was a reason why the mother and father of one family spoke with a thick accent. We asked why, received our answer and went on with our childhoods and friendships together. There was a reason why one Dad moved out of his house. We asked why, received our answer and went on with our childhoods and friendships together. Nothing was a big deal, perhaps it should have been, but it wasn't. Boys and girls played together...my gender didn't mean I could only play with dolls or do craft work. On reflection, I was a tomboy at times and a real girl's girl at others. I didn't think of it that way though...I was happy being me.*

I was a girl who loved meeting her best friend each afternoon to find a quiet place to share our different school experiences... friendships, boys, teachers. My best friend attended a different primary school than I did and the excitement of catching up after school was sometimes too much to bear. A small valley separated us, with four houses in between. Some days we would call out to each other over this small valley, "Would you like to come over and play?" Some days when our voices could not be heard, we would call each other on the telephone, "Hello, I was wondering if you would like to come over and play." Of course we would like but it seemed our way to ask anyway. I wonder why we didn't make a certain time and place to meet? Perhaps we were dependent on our mothers' plans once we were collected from school?

I was a girl who worked with her older brothers and friends to build a cubby house in the bush land surrounding our home. We made use of tree logs and a lot of dedication from our older siblings for our project. The cubby house was finished but it seemed a small group of us preferred to continue to meet for our secret club meetings underneath the shelter of the trampoline of one of my neighbours. I'm not sure exactly about the purpose of the meetings but I remember taking attendance and having to ask my Mum to sign a letter saying that I would be missing out on one of the meetings!

We had undefined spaces to live our childhoods in, as long as we were home by dark. Were my parents ever worried? I presume so but the only advice we received was to "be careful", "stay together", "stay off the road" and "don't talk to strangers." The only time I felt in danger was when a bushfire swept through parts of the bush land surrounding our homes. My home was my friends' home; my friends' homes were my home. I knocked to enter but once I was inside I felt right at home. It was common to eat meals in different homes and have sleepovers every weekend.

In our neighbourhood, we had unstructured time to play unsupervised and in our own way. I went to Jazz Ballet on Friday afternoon and Netball on Saturday morning. This left just over 25 hours a week for walking, talking, playing in our family's boat parked in the garage, board games, jumping on the trampoline, doing homework, playing basketball and cricket, making crafts and being silly.

All the major learnings I recall are not in school. I was a child who did not have one difficulty in school. I loved school, schoolwork, teachers and my school friends. However, I loved my neighbourhood more. I always felt excited at the end of the school day to be going home to my neighbourhood life where I remember learning to ride my bike. It was such a magical moment making it to the end of our long driveway without the feel of my brother's hand on the seat underneath keeping me balanced and upright. A feeling of pure joy and excitement...a sense of freedom. I now wouldn't need to wait for my brothers to arrive home from school to help me ride. I certainly didn't need training wheels anymore. I was so proud of myself, of my accomplishments. Of course, I had many mishaps perfecting my skills but I had overcome the biggest challenge – that first solo ride!

My neighbourhood was a place where I also learned that work could be difficult and time-consuming. Where I learned that some friendships last forever and some last for as long as they are needed. Where I learned that confidence in a friend could encourage you to do a back flip off the side of the pool. Where I learned to write for meaningful purposes – to write a menu for the restaurant we created for our parents, and to read books to find out how we were going to keep the silkworms alive. Where I learned North from South, East from West, when we became lost on a bushwalk. I learned the power of friendship when a childhood trouble was overwhelming me and the feeling of peace when fights would be resolved between friends. Thinking back, the only time there were arguments was when one of the neighbourhood kids brought friends from their primary school over to stay. Many of us went to different primary schools as many families moved to the neighbourhood when the children were already settled in another school. Could this strong sense of place and identity as insiders have been at the root of our disgruntlements?

When I was thirteen years old, this wonderful chapter of my life journey ended. Our family sold our house and moved…moved far away from my place, my childhood place, my neighbourhood growing up. I remember my last day at the house. All the furniture was removed, all my belongings packed in boxes and now travelling in the back of a removal truck to an unknown place…the next chapter in my life. Some of my friends came over as we had planned to have this wonderful game of hide and seek in all the places which were once filled with material things. We were too sad to play this game though, so we went for a walk to all the places of our childhood and my friends helped me say good bye, to stand in the cubby house one last time, to visit their homes one last time – we did many things that day, one last time.

When my friends left, I decided to leave my mark in my bedroom and I wrote a letter on one of the shelves inside my walk-in wardrobe. I cannot remember exactly what I wrote – something like wishing them a good as time as I had had in my neighbourhood.

My two older brothers stayed behind so I became an only child. My identity as a sister shifted. I remember the first day of school at my new town and coming home and being so upset because there was another Nicky and the teacher said, "Well, we have to call one of you Nicole and one of you Nicky" – and she made us choose. The class decided that I would be called Nicole because the other Nicky was there first. I remember coming home so upset because I couldn't even keep my name. Even that had changed.

My memories of everyday life in my childhood helped me to appreciate Eyles' (1989) ideas about the importance of the rules, resources, routines and available relationships for everyday life in a place. In my own stories I noticed that rules and resources supported everyday life activities which in turn served to enhance relationships.

Many of my activities and learnings were made possible through relationships with others. The relationships also gave me a sense of security and feelings of belonging, of being integrated into a community, and of having status and a positive identity. As Hay (1992) has explained, bonds to place enable relationships which are a source of meaning, security and identity.

The "rules" and "resources" for us as children in our neighbourhood provided rich space and material for the development of relationships. It was an unspoken rule that children could make themselves "at home" in each other's houses. The spoken rule of being home by dark, supplemented by other rules such as staying together, away from strangers and off the road provided us much latitude for play together in our free time. The resources of bush land, a trampoline, a pool, and other open areas for games and play offered space and material for many forms of active or imaginative play as well as hang-out places for private talk.

Chawla (1992) writes that children's personalities and perspectives are shaped by the experiences they are able to have in the places available to them. Although I grieved the loss of my childhood place when I moved at the age of 13, the effects of my experiences during childhood have remained with me. Even recently, in a graduate program in a new country, I extend and respond to invitations to "come and play" or "attend meetings" much as I did in my childhood. I do my part. I expect to participate in community activity and am always invited to do so and/or to help organize such activities. My relationships are happy and peaceful. In my childhood neighbourhood, our parents supported us in being inclusive and in playing with the children of all parents regardless of differences of one kind or another. Similarly, it seems second nature to me to be inclusive and to show interest in and offer welcome and support to newcomers in my current community. Eyles (1989) explains that values, motivations, and roles are built and maintained through actions in everyday life. These aspects of identity then give direction to further actions. I perceive continuity of this kind when I recall my childhood experiences and reflect upon my current ways of seeing and acting in the world.

Ashcroft (2001, p. 156) emphasizes that

> like culture itself, place is in a continual and dynamic state of formation, a process intimately bound up with the culture and identity of its inhabitants. Above all, place is a result of habitation, a consequence of the ways in which people inhabit space.

These ideas from Ashcroft underscore that place evolves like "a discourse in process" (Ashcroft, 2001, p. 155). This idea is consistent with Eyles' (1989) discussion about how the routines established in everyday life in a place become additional structures supporting or constraining further everyday life. Eyles notes that people create and re-create their identities through their actions in everyday life. Ashcroft states that how a place evolves is bound up with the culture and identity of its inhabitants. As children in our neighbourhood, through the routine activities of our everyday lives, we established roles, motivations, and values related to being friends, siblings, and welcoming neighbours. Thus, the on-going development of our identities which shaped ways of seeing and acting in subsequent everyday life, contributed to the kind of place the neighbourhood became, or as Ellis (In press) would say, to "the whole experience of being there."

My reflections about the ways in which I see continuity in my identity from my childhood neighbourhood to the site of my current graduate program reflects another way that identity is bound up with the way place evolves. The roles, values, and motivations I established in previous places affected my ways of seeing and acting in the place of my graduate program. In as much as the way I shape my everyday life in my graduate program affects everyday life for everyone else in the program, one can say that the way this place—the Elementary Education Department at the University of Alberta as a place for students in its graduate program—evolves is bound up with the culture and identity of inhabitants. The way other graduate students shape their everyday lives also affects everyday life for all of us in the program. And the ways in which they shape their everyday lives are influenced by aspects of identity they have established in other places. This discussion could be extended to examine how rules, resources, and available relationships in the graduate program also constrain or facilitate everyday life for inhabitants but that would be a study unto itself.

The recollections of everyday life in my childhood also resonated with key findings of research on children's place attachment as discussed in Chapter 2. I was sorry to leave my neighbourhood—a place that had afforded security, social affiliation, and opportunities for creative expression and exploration. Unstructured time and the availability of natural environments and undeveloped waste spaces were well used by us as children. We intensified our friendships and enjoyed our autonomy as we explored the bush land and engaged in many forms of active or imaginative play together.

Using all of these understandings about *place* in my inquiry, I paid attention to everyday life within and outside of the schoolrooms and worked to understand (1) how rules, resources, routines, and available relationships constrained everyday life, and (2) how identities and everyday lives were related. I remained alert to the ways in which everyday life in the whole place of the home sites might be a source of meaning for the families' interpretations of events in the schoolrooms. I expected that the identities home tutors and children brought with them into the schoolrooms would play out in the kind of "school learning places" that evolved. I was aware of the significance of the resources, rules, routines, and available relationships in the schoolrooms as structures constraining the everyday life that constituted the "school learning places." Being aware of these ideas focused my attention as I endeavoured to perceive and make sense of the complexity and dynamics of everyday life both within and outside of the schoolrooms on the families' properties.

I paid particular attention to the relationships between the home tutors and their children as these were negotiated or re-worked in the schoolrooms. I observed that the women in the three families had pedagogical relationships with their children in other places outside of the schoolrooms. Learning and teaching extended beyond the schoolroom door, into the house yard, into the sheep or cattle yards, into large work sheds, into the seamlessly endless paddocks, into dried creek beds and water-filled dams, into town communities and school-organized events. I paid attention to the mothers' diverse personal, familial and professional roles in other places to further my understanding of their behaviour in the schoolrooms. Further, by inquiring into the children's everyday life experiences in the places they used outside of the schoolrooms I was able to better appreciate their identities and their responses to everyday life in the schoolrooms. Learning what was afforded in their favourite places outside of the schoolrooms helped me to consider both the nature of experiences that were supported or limited within their schoolrooms and their responses to these.

Figure 1 highlights many of the elements of *place* as a conceptual framework that provided focuses in my inquiry. The visual depiction of the "prescribed" schoolroom, shown empty of people, represents the question about everyday life in the schoolrooms. The words set against the background of pictures of one of the properties serve as reminders about (1) the significance of the structural formations of place for the everyday lives that are possible; and (2) the relationships between people's identities and their actions in everyday life. Showing many of the *place* key words or phrases simultaneously serves as a visual representation of the complexity of the relationships among these elements. Presenting a visual of the idealized teaching space against the backdrop of the realistic lived space emphasizes that what realistically happens in the schoolrooms is related to everything else all at once.

Overall, attending to ideas about *place* provided me with a coherent structure, not only as an accommodating perspective for what I was seeing, hearing, feeling and experiencing in the research, but also as a non-narrowing perspective facilitating holistic interpretation and understanding. For both home tutors and children, the schoolroom experiences could not be well understood in isolation from the network of the other places and experiences in their everyday lives.

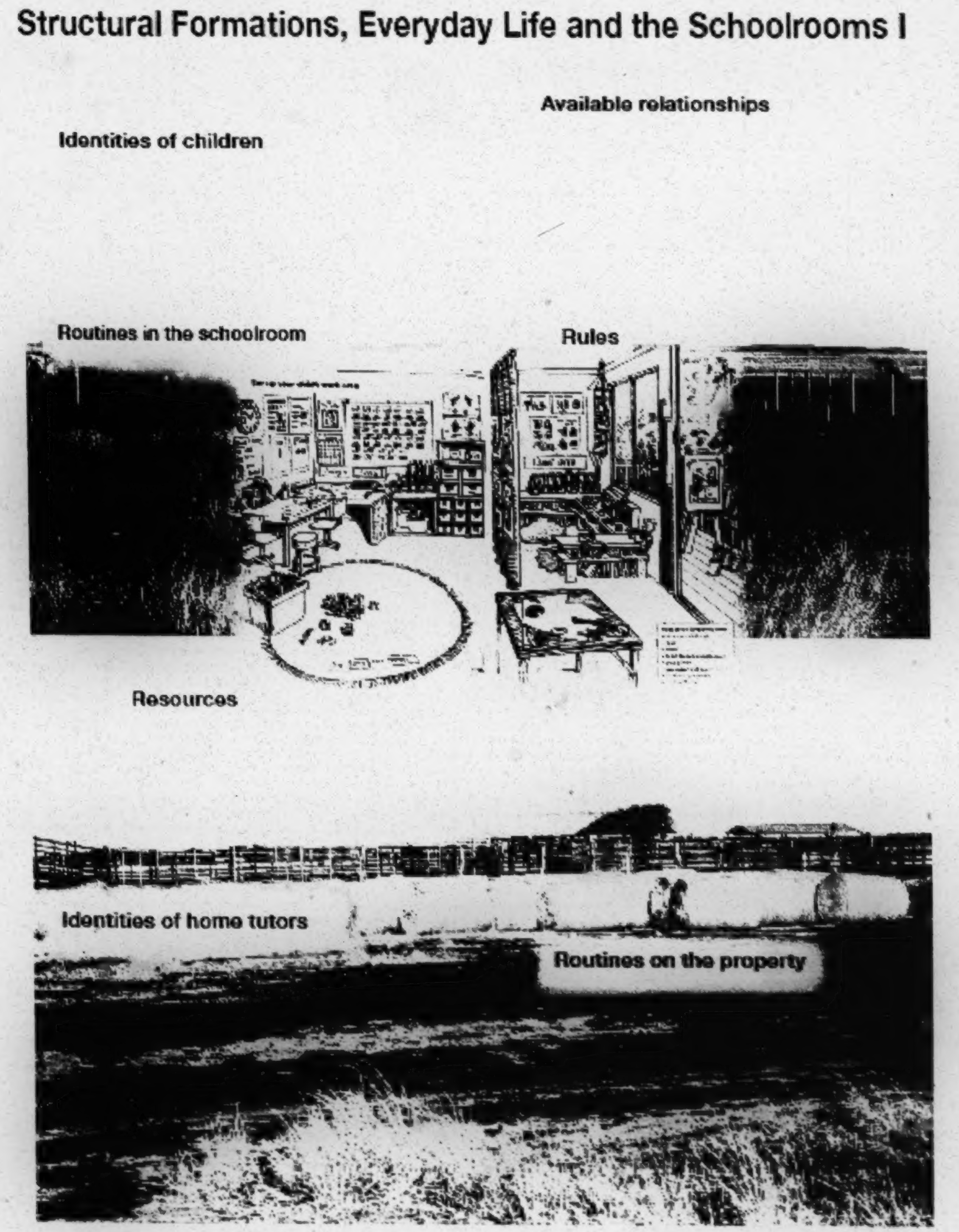

Structural Formations, Everyday Life and the Schoolrooms I
Available relationships
Identities of children
Routines in the schoolroom
Rules
Resources
Identities of home tutors
Routines on the property

Figure 1. Structural formations, everyday life and the schoolrooms I

Curriculum-as-lived-experiences

When I refer to school curriculum, I recognise that it does not have one shared and accepted meaning. I am aware that the field of curriculum has been conceptualized in different ways to represent movements (Pinar, 1997), orientations (Eisner, 2002) or positions (Miller & Seller, 1985) since the early 1900's. What these conceptualizations provide is a window into how curriculum, teaching and learning have been viewed and valued by major educational philosophers, governments and societies and, as Eisner (2002) states,

> the dominant framework for viewing curriculum has consequences for the practical operation of school; each orientation harbors an implicit conception of educational virtue. Furthermore, each orientation both serves to legitimize certain educational practices and to negatively sanction others. It also functions as an ideological center around which political support can be gathered. (p. 70)

Two ideas about curriculum which are pertinent to this inquiry are drawn from Aoki (1991) who describes two curriculum worlds – curriculum-as-plan and curriculum-as-lived-experiences. “As works of people, inevitably, [curricula-as-plans] are imbued with the planners' orientations to the world, which inevitably include their own interests and assumptions about ways of knowing and about how teachers and students are to be understood” (Aoki, 1991, p. 7). The distance education curriculum-as-plan, in the form of curriculum units of work, home tutor guides and activities and resource sheets, are developed by an educational branch working outside of the Gorman School of Distance Education and outside of the families' school learning places. The curriculum developers are most often teachers who have never experienced teaching and learning in a home environment or visited staff or families involved in a school of distance education.

Teaching staff and home tutors might expect that they should faithfully implement these external curriculum plans and programs. However, supported by fellow postmodern and poststructuralist scholars such as Pinar (1997), Grumet (1995) and Davis and Sumara (2000), Aoki (1991) holds that school curriculum is not simply a technical document specifying content to be covered, outlining prescribed learning outcomes, detailing teaching strategies and stipulating assessment procedures. Aoki recognizes that curriculum is not static, not an unmoving form that teachers can systematically implement or students can passively receive. Curriculum is the lived experience of teachers and students as they engage together in the learning process. Aoki's work alerts me to my responsibility to ask questions and seek understanding about the nature of the educational experience for children and home tutors in my inquiry. I expected to learn how the curriculum-as-plan, the distance education curriculum documents, was lived by students and their home tutors in distance education.

Conducting the inquiry

Site

The inquiry (data collection) was conducted in three families' homes in Queensland, Australia. The Michaelson, Carson and Mitchell families lived on sheep and/or cattle properties and were enrolled with the Gorman School of Distance Education.

Participants

A letter of introduction of my inquiry with the Gorman School of Distance Education was sent to each family through the school postal system, accompanied by a supporting letter from the Deputy Principal (see Appendix A for letters and Appendix B for consent forms). The letter of introduction asked for volunteers, outlining that they could contact me directly to discuss their interest, to ask questions or to seek clarification. Approximately 12 of the 131 families receiving invitations contacted me. From these volunteers, I chose three families to participate in my inquiry:

The Michaelson family: Louise (mother/home tutor), Daniel (husband/father), Thomas (8) and Timothy (7).

The Carson family: Kate (mother/home tutor), John (husband/father), Emma (13) and Melissa (10).

The Mitchell family: Cherie (mother/home tutor), Jeremy (husband/father), Nathan (9), Adrian (7), Kyle (5) and Paul (3).

I chose the Michaelson, Carson and Mitchell families for their explanatory power (Scott & Usher, 1999); that is, for what I thought they could illustrate separately and together. Together they offered diversity in terms of medium and long-term experiences with home schooling and home tutors with a variety of educational backgrounds. They also offered typicality in that in each family the mother was the home tutor, rather than a governess or the father. I included the family of a child for whom I was the teacher as most other volunteers were very active in executive roles in the school community or had only one child at home. I already had one participant who was active in executive roles in the distance education program and who had one child at home. It was also my preference to choose families with children who are in, or who have recently experienced, their early childhood years of schooling. I am familiar with the Preschool – Year 3 guides and documents in both the state and distance education curricula. I also bring a background of a Bachelors degree and a Masters degree specializing in early childhood education and wished to further my understanding of early childhood education in distance education programs.

The schedule of data collection

The inquiry began early in term three of the four terms in a Queensland school year. To conduct the interpretive case studies, I visited with each of the three families on four occasions over a period of five months, each a three-day visit. The dates of the visits during 2004 were:

The Michaelson family: July 25 – July 27; August 15 – August 17; September 5 – September 7; October 17 – October 19

The Carson family: August 1 – August 3; August 29 – August 31; October 10 – October 12; October 31 – November 2

The Mitchell family: August 8 – August 10; September 12 – September 14; October 3 – October 5; October 24 – October 26

During the time of my inquiry, Volunteers For Isolated Students' Education (VISE) tutors stayed with many distance education families for six weeks [VISE is a volunteer educational service set up to assist children and parents in remote areas of Australia. VISE tutors are mainly retired teachers or adults with experience in education. VISE tutors stay with families for about six weeks. Their travel and accommodation costs are paid for by the family requesting a tutor.] The three families in my study each had a VISE tutor for part of the inquiry period. Although this took away at least one observation opportunity of the home tutor in the schoolroom, each VISE tutor's presence proved valuable for learning about such things as the routines, expectations and home tutors' connection with the space of the school learning place and their role in it. For example, I was present when the Michaelson's VISE tutors were being introduced to the schoolroom by Louise. I observed what Louise chose to share with them first, what she focused on in terms of preparing for the first day of a new unit of work and the new school week. As Louise shared in her journal, "*I gave them an awful lot of information in one quick session. I hope they will be all right*" (Interview, July 27th, 2004).

Forms of data collection

Using the conceptual frameworks of *place*, the data collection was guided by the following questions: How do home tutors and students experience distance education? What is it like for the home tutors to participate in distance education? What is it like for the students to participate in distance education? What is the meaning of the distance education activities for the home tutors/students? What is the significance of distance education in the context of the rest of the families' lives? How do home tutors and students create and experience a "school learning place" for the distance education program? The first three questions focused my attention on the everyday lives of home tutors both within and outside of the schoolrooms and how they experienced these. The next two questions reminded me to take notice of how everyday life outside of the schoolrooms and the identities supported by it, might serve as a backdrop of meaning for children's and home tutors' interpretation of events within the schoolrooms. The last question guided me to watch for the agency of home tutors in establishing or introducing rules, routines and resources in the schoolroom and the agency of both home tutors and children in shaping everyday lives for themselves in their schoolrooms. All of the questions reflect my attitude of openness and goodwill to understand the families' experiences in their wholeness and complexity.

I began the inquiry prepared with many possibilities for data collection, such as dialogue journals, photography, observation and semi-structured interviews. The participants and I selected the most appropriate data collection methods with an understanding that these might change along the way. Smith's (2002, p. 190) advice guided me in keeping these plans tentative: "It is impossible to establish a 'correct method' for research in advance of an encounter with what is being investigated. This is because what is being investigated holds at least part of the answer to how it should be investigated."

Field notes

As an interpretive inquirer, I kept an inquiry notebook. My work in these field notes was supported by both my graduate courses in early childhood education and methodological suggestions by Richardson (1994), discussed later in this sub-section. My recent graduate studies involving the work of Cannella (1997) and Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (1999) alerted me to the need to destabilize dominant discourses in early childhood education. My growing awareness and understanding of subjugated knowledges, dominant modernist views of children and learning, and the power constructed through the language and actions of professionalism (Cannella, 1997) have caused me to rethink some beliefs and structures that had been firmly entrenched in my consciousness. For example, I have increasingly appreciated that intellectual, physical, emotional and social ability takes many forms and involves many different aspects. Dahlberg, Moss and Pence's ideas helped me to remain open to new possibilities and to recognize the importance of asking new questions, challenging old beliefs, and deepening understanding. Rather than focus on typically developing students, I have sought a more informed understanding of students' abilities and educational and familial lives so that learning and development, in all its complexity, can be better understood.

Knowing that much of my previous observational experiences, however, were about child observation used to assess children's development according to predetermined categories, I looked for guidance in being more open to possibilities using my most recent growth in understanding. I found this guidance in the field notes, which I used as a form of pedagogical documentation where plans, questions, enthusiasms, doubts, and ruminations were all part of the process.

> *I enjoy writing these journal entries. I am tempted to bring a laptop to save typing these words into a computer document during the week. I am hesitant to do this as I like the feeling of an aching hand which highlights the connections with recollections and feelings flowing from my body onto paper via a pen. I also prefer to write with a pencil when writing my observations to remind me that they are not reality but tentative events - what is documented is not a direct representation of what is said or done, it is not a true account of what has happened – it is a social construction which in no way can exist apart from my own involvement, my own selections of what to record or leave unrecorded.* (Green, field notes, August 30th, 2004)

Richardson (1994) discussed writing as a legitimate method of inquiry and raised the question of how to produce data in a way that are attended to, that make a difference. Following an essay discussing the historical roots of social scientific writing, the postmodernist possibilities for qualitative writing and the future of ethnography, Richardson offered a compendium of writing suggestions and exercises she says reflects her own processes and preferences through writing. Building on the work of Glaser and Straus (1967), Richardson introduced one strategy using four categories to guide researchers so that "settling words together in new configurations lets us hear, see, and feel the world in new dimensions" (Richardson, 1994, p. 522). She suggests that this is a way to be more present, honest and engaged in research writing. The writing encouraged by these categories reflects the tools of pedagogical documentation which positions researchers to take responsibility for making their own meanings and coming to their own decisions about what is going on in the pedagogical work. I adopted these categories to give labels to different content I included in the field notes. The four categories offered by Richardson assisted me in shifting away from a focused concern on theories used to assess the children's learning and development according to predetermined categories. I also shifted from third person observation to second person "making sense" of the learning process and resisted the temptation to evaluate the home tutors' teaching strategies and practices. The framework of the field notes included the following:

Observation notes: During each visit with each family, I captured concrete and detailed descriptions of such things as "…events, people, things heard and overheard, conversations among people, [informal] conversations with people" in the inquiry notebook (Lofland & Lofland, 1995, p. 93). These detailed descriptions were recorded with the recognition that they were active reconstructions of the events and contexts because they could not be recorded without my interpretation (Connelly & Clandinin, 1991).

Methodological notes: These notes were evaluative and reflective of the data collection methods I used, focusing on what needed to be considered from each moment forward, and mindful of the processes and methods of my inquiry in developing and sustaining an inquiry relationship with each family.

Theoretical notes: Alternative interpretations, connections with theory and literature, critical inquiries into my assumptions and biases, and attempts at searching for significance and meaning were written in the field notes as a way to record my epistemological stance (Richardson, 1994).

Personal notes: My impressions, feelings and other emotional responses were also recorded alongside the chronological notes relative to what was happening in the settings I was observing and participating in (Lofland & Lofland, 1995). I used the space of the field notes to find things out, to learn something that I didn't realize or understand before I wrote it, to create habits of thought and to become attentive to my senses (Richardson, 1994). Writing personal notes provided the opportunity to move between keeping records of the experience under inquiry and recording personal responses to how I was experiencing the experience as an inquirer (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Participant observation

Bogdan & Biklen (1992, p. 30) explain that "... action can be best understood when it is observed in the setting in which it occurs. ...To divorce the act, word, or gesture from its context, is for the qualitative researcher, to lose sight of significance." Spending a total of twelve days with each family, over a period of five months, allowed more time for the families' educational lives, familial events and teaching and learning environments to register with me. I felt I spent adequate time with each family to be a sensitive reader of and questioner of situations and interactions. The time between visits allowed the space to grasp the huge number of events and narratives captured in my memory, in my heart and in the written records of the field notes and interview transcripts.

I found myself beginning as complete observer but with time, as the participants and I felt more comfortable with my presence in their home, I became an observer as participant (Merriam, 1998). Helping with a question, listening to explanations, and giving feedback on work are just some of the ways I naturally became involved. The children enthusiastically appropriated me as a playmate. The home tutors were very detailed and specific when debriefing with me about how my presence affected the behaviour of them and their children in the schoolrooms. With time, they became more accustomed to my presence there.

The conceptual ideas about *place* informed my observations and activities both inside and outside of the schoolrooms. Using the place ideas offered by Eyles' (1989) and Ashcroft (2001), I chose what to focus on and I chose what was important to pursue or explore. I intentionally perceived or noticed all that I could with regards to both (1) everyday life and identity for both home tutors and children, and (2) the resources, rules, routines, and available relationships in the various places of the families' everyday lives on their properties.

Semi-structured interviews and informal conversations

Semi-structured interviews were planned for each visit with each home tutor and on three occasions with the students. The semi-structured interviews were tape-recorded. Untaped informal conversations were recorded in my inquiry notebook as they occurred throughout our time together. The tape-recorded interviews were transcribed. The purpose for the interviews was to arrive at a more informed and sophisticated understanding of distance education by thinking "things through, glancing at the mirror.

the other holds up to us, discovering not only the other, but ourselves" (Weber, 1986, p. 2).

To establish the context of the families' experience, the first interview involved asking a set of semi-structured questions for the home tutors to tell their own stories, in their own ways, about their past lives up until they became home tutors (Seidman, 1991). Subsequent interviews invited further conversation about the formative experiences that supported home tutors' conceptualizations of teaching at home. For example, just as Knowles (1998) did with homeschooling parents in North America, I explored the relationships between women's home tutoring practices and the role models they held; the elements of mother-teacher role identities; the women's own experiences of learning in formal school settings; and the experiences they had had in distance education as home tutors and parents Appendix C outlines the questions that I used in the interviews with home tutors.

In the early questions of each recorded semi-structured interview, I noticed how I relied on the formulated questions by reading the exact questions in the order they were printed on my interview sheet. With increased comfort, I shifted attention from information gathering where the focus was on the right questions, to interaction, where the focus was on the process. Upon reflection, I am also reminded of my biggest learning from the interviews - the inquiry is bounded not by the questions but by the relationship I developed and nurtured with the home tutors and children.

> The most important personal characteristic interviewers must have is a genuine interest in other people. They must be deeply aware that other people's stories are of worth in and of themselves and because they offer something to the interviewer's experience. (Seidman, 1991, p. 71).

It was also important that I developed relationships with the children. I planned to have an interview with the children on three visits with each family. The first, a “get to know you” interview, included questions that would provide access to the child's preoccupations, interpretive frames for making sense of the world; fears, hopes, likes, dislikes, significant others, aspirations; the story the child is telling himself about himself and about the world. This global appreciation of the child's meaning-making is important for eventually discerning the significance of the distance education experience within the child's life/reality as a whole. The second interview used photography as a basis for interviewing (see next section below). The third interview focused on the child's experience of "school learning” with their Mum/home tutor. The interviews assisted me in crafting a portrait of the child as a whole, complex person, assisting me in interpreting the significance of the child's comments about the distance education experience. Appendix D outlines the questions that I used in the interviews with students.

Melissa was the only student who was interested in drawing and responded to the invitation to draw what a good day and a bad day in the school learning place looked like. As an early childhood educator, I have observed in my work with children what Malchiodi (1998) has also found in her experience as an art educator, art therapist, and clinical counsellor, that is, drawing provides a way for communicating and relating experiences using a safe and comfortable medium. The drawings were used to support our conversation about Melissa’s experience.

The children were not always interested in talking to me in a more formal way, with a tape recorder and a set of questions close by. When their school work was completed for the day, the students were reluctant to participate with me in activities I chose as they viewed such things as talking about the photographs and drawing pictures as school-related activities. Hence, the emphasis in data collection shifted. I benefited from spending time with the children in their own way in their everyday lives, continually observing them, interacting with them and scrambling to record these times in my field notebook. These periods of time together – for example, riding on their motorbike to their swimming dam, or having a picnic in their cubby by the dry riverbed – revealed aspects of themselves that were not discovered through interviewing. The structured interviews failed to offer a rich, detailed picture of children's place feelings. Of greater value to me, in gaining insight into children's place experience, was that I was alongside them as they moved through their environment and made contact with the places available to them.

> *When I arrived today, Cherie was outside moving hoses around watering and inside cleaning. Jeremy was in the shed doing odd jobs and the boys were inside. Paul, Adrian and Nathan came outside and kindly helped me to carry in my bags and then Adrian and Nathan and I went for a walk to say hello to Jeremy. We then ventured into the vegetable garden (fruit trees) and picked some more mulberries – bigger and juicier than three weeks ago – YUM! Adrian also collected some eggs from the chooks and put them in a tin, which we later managed to drop between a pass from him to me – oops!*
>
> *I spotted a pond I never knew existed. Nathan explained that in less than a month they had cleared so much weed from the pond, scooping it onto a tyre and dragging it ashore. They had also cleared some of the prickle bushes from around the pond too. Nathan appeared excited telling my about this hard work. The boys decide not to go swimming as they had just arrived back from town and they had been swimming in the town pool. We did check one of the nets in the pond. No yabbies and the bait was missing so Adrian dragged it out and he put it in the shed with all the others.*
> (Green, field notes, October 3rd 2004)

The periods of time together were valuable in developing a relationship with the children, a relationship in which I was not just a teacher from the Gorman School of

Distance Education. My learnings from these occasions informed my observations in the schoolroom and conversations with home tutors. I became attentive to what the children regarded as their learning spaces and/or meaningful places, and what places the women valued for playing, learning or working. I tried to understand why the children gravitated to certain places, what places the children talked about as meaningful or described as disliked. I looked for learning activities offered in the distance education curriculum which reflected the same kinds of experiences they were having in other places of their everyday lives. For example, the children had opportunity for creative expression in places of unstructured play. What opportunities did Thomas, Timothy, Melissa, Nathan, Adrian, Kyle and Paul have for creative expression or exploration in the course of the "school day?"

The children and I had many informal conversations about their school work and their views about anything that was happening. I had many informal conversations with the home tutors around the kitchen table after dinner, while they were planning the next school activity, or while the children were enjoying morning recess or lunch--anywhere Louise, Kate and Cherie were willing to talk about what they think or feel, and in contexts where they believed I was willing to listen (Eisner, 1998).

> Conversation entails listening. The listener's response may constitute a probe into experience that takes the representation of experience far beyond what is possible in an interview. Indeed, there is probing in conversation, in-depth probing, but it is done in a situation of mutual trust, listening, and caring for the experience described by the other. (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, p. 422)

As the researcher, I influenced the data collection in the conversations I initiated and the questions I asked of the participants. I engaged each conversation and interaction and made sense of it. Anderson and Jack (1991, p. 19) offered important insights into interviews with women, introducing me to the idea of the "presence of absence…the hollows, centres, caverns within the workplaces where activity that one might expect is missing…." Anderson and Jack's ideas reminded me of the importance of being genuinely present in the interview, committed and open to the participant to "create the possibility of going beyond the conventional stories of women's lives, their plans and their satisfactions, to reveal experience in a less culturally edited form" (p. 24). For example, during the interviews I tried not to interrupt or cut off the women even if their response to the question seemed irrelevant to the question. I let silent periods or paused moments linger longer than I would in a "regular" conversation to give the women time for reflection. I explicitly asked what particular words meant to them, such as when the word "challenging" was used in our conversations. In wanting to know and understand how Louise, Kate and Cherie felt about their lives generally, and their teaching roles specifically, I also encouraged them to talk about their feelings as well as their activities.

Photography: creating images for discussion

I was attracted to having the home tutors and students take their own photographs as a way to engage them in the data collection and to offer them another means for conveying their own perspectives (Walker, 1993). "The power of photography lies in its ability to be a source of data as well as a tool for eliciting data when employed as a stimulus" (Cappello, 2001, p. 4). While Bach (2001) expresses that photographs slow time into moments which can be studied, I would like to emphasise the use of photographs as a basis for conversation in learning about different aspects of the families' experiences of distance education – to thicken the ways I see the families' educational and familial lives (Bach, 2001). Having the participants take photographs, and using those photographs as a basis for conversation is recognized as an effective way to gain participants' greater interest, to have them reference aspects of their experience and knowledge (Pink, 2001), and to encourage the sharing of more information during interviews by using photographs (Touliatos & Compton, 1983).

Two families chose to use their own digital cameras due to their comfort level and ease with the technology and one family used my own regular camera. All cameras were used with the intention of seeing aspects of the families' lives through their eyes (Bach, 2001). Acknowledging that the photographer cannot be separated from the photograph he or she has created (Cappello, 2001), the home tutors and children were asked to take photographs that we could later use to stimulate discussion, to encourage participation or to engage self-reflection (Walker, 1993). The focus was on the relationship between the images created and the ways in which the families and I made sense of them, not just what they portrayed (Walker, 1993). "From a postmodern perspective photographs are context specific and their meaning depends on who is viewing the photograph and the circumstances during which the photograph is viewed" (Caine, 2002, p. 84).

In between two visits, I asked the home tutors to utilize the camera to document their everyday lives visually:

> Start to think about how you might photograph a day in your own life. Notice what your patterns are, what gets repeated day after day, what seems trivial, what seems important.
> Then one day when you are in the mood, record the day as you go along.
> Photograph what you see. Don't only take photographs of people but also think of how you could perhaps use parts of a room, or objects to say some things about yourself.
> If you haven't already in one of the photographs, take another photograph of yourself in the scene – someone else could take the photo or you could use the timer or remote.

Although I tried to leave the photography project as open as possible, asking the home tutors to choose only one day raised some issues, especially when I had asked them to look for patterns in their everyday lives. It became apparent that it was an easier task to identify patterns after looking at the developed photos rather than before. For example, the first conversation with photographs was with Louise and she suggested that I would need to change the photo project to include non-school days as so much of her daily life of interacting with her husband and children was missing by focusing on a weekday.

> *I picked a day when we were mustering so it was often difficult to have some one take your picture. There is so much that you can't take a picture of that is just part of the day.*
> *There aren't any of me doing anything with the boys outside of school. Generally I try and do something everyday. But that day we were mustering so it was a busy day.*
> (October 18th 2004)

I realize now that the purpose and direction given for the photographic activity should have been to simply take pictures of activities that are typical, frequent, or important components of their everyday lives. Cherie too, discussed the reflections prompted by the photography task:

> *It was quite interesting thinking about what a dull life I lead. It was hard to capture, what to take or not to take. Is this a normal day or an extraordinary day? It was a different exercise; it was worth doing just to see what you do. I don't think that you realize some of the things that you do and you just take it for granted. You just do it and don't realize that it's a chore or anything.*
> (November 9th 2004)

Cherie also shared concerns about what photographs were taken, what events and interactions were recorded or were unrecorded.

> *I'd hate to say it but it looks like I'm a dull person. If someone else looked at that they'd probably think that it was a dull sort of lifestyle. Or they might think, what's so hard about that. It's the other little things that go with it. You don't just put them to bed, you read them a story. Or having a bath, you have to get them*

> *dry and get them dressed. It's the other little things that go with it, that make it more interesting.*
>
> *Like the schoolroom it looks like the kids are having a good time, but it's not always like that. That I can get very cranky, my mood can change quite easily. Probably doesn't show how frustrated you can get. When one kid is saying 'Can you help me' and you're saying, 'Can you hang on a moment till I get this kid started?' And it's not showing Paul making a mess. He frustrates us at the moment cause he is just into everything. It probably doesn't show you how helpful you can be to them. Sometimes you can just show them a simple or easier ways of doing things. It's not often but you do lose your cool in the schoolroom. It does in a way capture what we do.*
> (November 9th 2004)

In talking about the emotions, feelings and responses to what was missing in photographs, Cherie and Louise were bringing to the fore different layers of reality which may not have been discussed if the visuals were not available to us in our conversation. In this way, even with its apparent shortcomings, the photography work was productive for us. Kate offered the following comments when asked what was missing in the photographs.

> *...that whole social side of me is missing, it's not here. The little bit of time that I take to read every night, that's not here either. I guess in these pictures of school I've only taken photos of marking the papers. I haven't taken any of Melissa in the schoolroom, the interaction part of things. So probably I should have taken more. That I really am a fun loving person. I shouldn't say that it doesn't capture my personality, because a lot of me is like that, being studious. You wouldn't know that I do like to have a joke, it's got a CD player there and I know that it can be used for fun music. But in that academic background you'd think that it was for playing tapes and recording things. So you wouldn't know that I really like music. And you probably wouldn't know that I don't mind a red wine or two from that.*
> (November 1st 2004)

During three visits, the children and I read stories about "place" together. These children's books included: "*My Place*" by Nadia Wheatley, "*A Year on Our Farm*" by Penny Matthews and Andrew McLean and "*A Place for Ben*" by Jeanne Titherington. The books we read together depended on the children's age and also their interest in the story. In between two visits the children were then asked to utilize the camera to document places in their daily lives. When they asked me, "what places?", we had a conversation about the kinds of places we had read about in the children's literature. The children remembered there were places for playing, hiding or being alone, for example. Together, we decided they might like to take photographs of places they liked or disliked, places they enjoyed certain activities in and places they didn't. When the photographs were developed, it became apparent that the children had all taken photographs of places which had positive significance to them, hence, the children were attached to, and attributed special meaning, to these places.

The distance education curriculum is highly dominated by the culture of the word. Writing takes a high priority in the school curriculum. The children appeared excited and encouraged about undertaking the photography project. When reading over the transcripts and remembering the conversations, using photography was important for encouraging greater interest from the children and sharing more information. In relation with the home tutors, perhaps it was due to the fact that the photographs shifted focus away from them, which enabled a deeper conversation; further reflection and involvement to explore specific contexts and their meanings to Louise, Kate and Cherie.

Dialogue journals

The inquiry relationship between each home tutor and myself continued between visits in the context of a dialogue journal. Although I gave Louise, Kate and Cherie the option of handwriting, they chose email to overcome the distance that separated us. It was my hope that the "pages" of the home tutors' journals would be a form of narrative that would "chronicle events as they happened; record impressions; thoughts and reactions to events and experiences; and [provide them with the opportunity] to work through and make sense of their experiences" (Cole & Knowles, 1995, p. 122). The following is an excerpt from three layers of written dialogue occurring the last few days of August, 2004. My communication with Cherie is an example of how the dialogue journals promised richness on so many different levels and for different reasons.

> **Cherie:**
> Hi Nicole,
> … Other than that our week has been much the same. Only one week to go before I'm back with the kids in the schoolroom. Which will be good. I'm looking forward to it. I just won't be able to take my time any more. I'll have to rush around to get every thing done by 8 in the morning.
> **Nicole:**
> If morning notices began at 9 a.m., would your "school day" also begin at 9 a.m.? I have just been thinking lately about [GSDE's] routines, timetabling and expectations and how these do or do not shape each family's routines, timetabling and expectations. Not only in the schoolroom but also in other aspects of the family's daily lives. For example, who has made the decision to have 8 a.m. in winter and in summer? How would 9 a.m. notices change any aspects of your family or educational lives?
> **Cherie:**
> It probably would make a difference I never really thought of it that way. I just guess that because notices have started and I'm there at that time what we'll just start. I think to that we finish early in the afternoon that it seems to give us an extra hour to get things done in that time even though some days we don't do things. Take care I'm off to think about getting tea ready.

An important feature of dialogue journals is the opportunity "for the writer to enter into a dialogical relationship with the self and with those who are permitted to share the text" (Thomas, 1995, p. 5). Using the dialogue journal as a responsive form of writing, I shared with the participants my own personal comments; analysis and contested perspectives which was intended to begin professional engagement and critical reflection (Thomas, 1995). In creating a conversation over time, my role also involved sharing ideas, feelings and concerns in writing, asking for clarification and asking questions to search for deeper meaning written throughout the home tutors' journal. The interactive format of the dialogue journal provided another space and place for the families and me to contribute to their interpretations of home education, to make their tacit knowledge more explicit. It was my hope to create a space and place in which the home tutors' mind and my mind could come together to bring about new understandings, ideas and possibilities (Staton, 1987). However, as the following dialogue entries highlight, the time the home tutors had to participate in this data collection activity was a limiting influence in the inquiry.

> *Nicole, I haven't written anything for you again this week. The [local newspaper's] trial Adobe software refused to be tricked into reloading anymore so rather than [the co-editor] doing all the layout, 12 pages of newspaper design landed in my lap and on my 'publisher program' this week. The shire council had three nights of community consultation for its corporate plan too. I hope I'm not letting you down too much.* (Kate, August 21st 2004)
>
> *I'm sorry about this I was going to do this Monday but got side tracked.*
> (Cherie, August 19th 2004)
>
> *Well the same again I always seem to run out of time. Anyway I have some time now.*
> (Cherie, August 29th 2004)

As the inquiry unfolded with each family, I came to admire in each of the home tutors their recognition of the imperfections of their teaching, and their honesty in sharing both positive and negative aspects of their experience as home tutors.

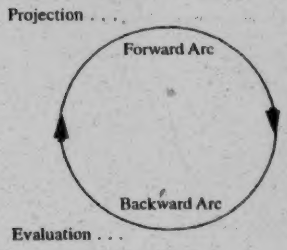
Documents/artefacts

Relevant resources were collected to help make sense of situations or to deepen understanding of events. Examples include school newsletters or other communications, timetables, schedules or planning developed by the home tutor, curriculum documents and school work completed by the child/ren. "These artefacts provide what Webb (1981) and colleagues have referred to as *unobtrusive measures*, the indirect surrogates for values, expectations, and behaviours that might otherwise be difficult to see and assess" (Eisner, 1998, p. 185). The documents/artefacts were also used as a basis for conversation, similar to the use of photography and drawing in the inquiry.

Data analysis

The hermeneutic circle (Figure 2) - the forward arc of projection and the return arc of uncovering - best provided the guidance for analysis, and for evaluating the interpretations I have made (Packer & Addison; 1989, Ellis, 1998). As an interpretive inquiry, each data collection activity was propelled by an ongoing analysis, which informed the subsequent inquiry (Ellis, 1998). During this process of an unfolding spiral of multiple hermeneutic circles (Ellis, 1998), observational and interview lenses were focused and refocused, research questions were framed and reframed, and hunches, trends, insights and ideas were be established or checked (Ely & Anzul, 1991). Each interpretation, through data collection or away from the field was revised and retested in a recursive movement.

Figure 2: The Hermeneutic Circle



entails making sense of a research participant, situation, or a set of data by drawing on one's forestructure, which is the current product of one's autobiography (beliefs, values, interests, interpretive frameworks) and one's relationship to the question or problem (pre-understandings and concerned engagement).

entails endeavoring to see what went unseen in the initial interpretation resulting from projection. The data are re-examined for contradictions, gaps, omissions, or confirmations of the initial interpretation. Alternate interpretive frameworks are purposefully searched for and "tried on."

Figure 2. The hermeneutic circle (Ellis, 1998, p. 27)

Constructing narrative accounts

As the first level of analysis I constructed narrative portraits of each family in Chapters 5, 6, and 7. According to the Latin root, a portrait seeks to reveal, expose and draw forth its subject (Mergendoller, 1989). In writing these portraits, it was my intention "to develop vicarious experiences for the readers, to give them a sense of 'being there'" (Stake, 1995, p. 63). To craft the narrative portraits I drew from my interview transcripts, field notes, and dialogue journals. These data had already been produced or coded through the interpretive lens of *place*. During observation and coding, my attention was focused on how the home tutors and children experienced everyday life in the schoolrooms and on how, within the schoolrooms, the resources, rules, routines, relationships, and identities of inhabitants contributed to the everyday life that evolved. I drew from and organized these data in an effort to present both coherent portrayals of everyday life in the schoolrooms and on the properties as well as a sense of the identities—values, motivations, roles, ways of seeing and acting--of the home tutors and children. My intention in writing the narrative portraits was to be descriptive. Working from all of my data to write the portraits was an opportunity for me to pull together much of the material from five months of data collection into a semblance of structure. My further interpretive work was accomplished in the remaining chapters.

Further Interpretive Work

In Chapters 8, 9, and 10 I present analyses or interpretive accounts that I developed in response to three questions. To write Chapter 8 I examined my data to answer the question of *how the three mothers experienced being home tutors*. In this account I largely drew from interview transcripts and dialogue journals to learn the thinking and feeling behind the actions I observed on the part of home tutors within and outside of the schoolrooms. The mothers' comments and self-reports spoke to the significance of their everyday lives in their families and on their properties for how they experienced the home tutor roles.

In Chapter 9 to highlight *the difference between the children's everyday lives within and outside of the schoolrooms*, I focused on the places children used in their everyday lives and the kinds of experiences they were able to have in these places. It was apparent that everyday life in the schoolrooms was largely experienced by both home tutors and children as a chore that simply had to be done. By contrasting experiences inside and outside of the schoolrooms, I hoped to clarify the significance of everyday life on the properties for how children responded to the everyday life that was possible in the schoolrooms.

Merriam (1998) suggests that case studies are useful for answering questions such as "How does this work?" or "Why is this happening?" In Chapter 10, I offer an interpretive account that maps *the dynamics of how everyday life in the schoolrooms came to evolve as it did.* My discernment of the key elements in the unfolding of everyday life in the schoolrooms was supported by my attention to identities—values, roles, motivations, ways of seeing and acting—and to rules, resources, routines and available relationships in the schoolrooms.

In Chapter 11, in a section entitled, "Wonderings about distance education," I reflect on how many of my understandings were transformed by this research. For example, in doing so, I report on many instances of completing the forward and backward arc of the hermeneutic circle to arrive at a less judgmental and more appreciative understanding of home tutors' practices.

CHAPTER 5

THE MICHAELSON FAMILY

Louise and Daniel live with their two sons, Thomas and Timothy, on a cattle property in Western Queensland.

About Louise

Louise has fond memories of her childhood, including many family experiences in the outdoors among nature. Doing the dishes after dinner each evening was the only negative family experience she could recall. Some of her positive recollections include playing games on summer evenings out in the yard with all of the neighbours, and her family's vacations. As Louise remembers,

> *The yearly holiday was always the best. We'd mostly go camping, three weeks of travelling around a specific area, whichever we chose to do that year. Camping, looking at natural attractions, we did a lot of the forests and the natural parks and things, and all across the country. That was sort of the highlight of the year. Dad was very busy so we had his attention for three weeks uninterrupted…* (Interview, July 27th, 2004)

During the regular routine of the school year, Louise's mother worked at home and her father departed for his place of employment as she and her siblings were waking. On most evenings, the family would have dinner together before her father was required to leave again for meetings. The location of the family's yearly vacation did not matter to Louise as much as the highlight of spending time with her father away from his work commitments. She speaks fondly of the family's pop-up trailer and the many learnings she gained from her father, for example, as they walked together discussing the fauna and flora, or used the axe and built campfires. The family also spent their holidays playing baseball, catch, frisbee and swimming in the lake.

During the regular routine of the school year, Louise would wake, have breakfast and then walk to school. Her siblings walked home with her for lunch and walked back to school for the afternoon each day, until they began high school and were required to travel by bus. After school hours were spent in her neighbourhood, with many peers to play with. Television did not have a big part in Louise's life. She recalls watching an average of 30 minutes of television programs before dinner each evening. Following dinner, Louise and her siblings completed their homework, although she remembers having much less school work than her siblings. She often became bored during this time and frequently found herself in trouble for bothering her brother and sister. After they completed their homework, Louise would create her own indoor play experiences with her siblings until bedtime.

In Years 1 through 4 Louise participated in a traditional classroom setting, with one educator teaching all of the subject areas, except for art and music which were taught by specialist teachers. In the final two years of elementary school, Louise attended a non-traditional school setting which was based on an open-area approach to teaching and learning. Her Year 5 and 6 classes consisted of approximately 150 students in a large space divided by moveable partitions. Louise enjoyed being able to see all of her friends coming and going as they used the art room down one end of the room, and the library at the other. Louise had several educators in these year levels teaching mathematics, language arts, social studies, science, art and music. A bell would signal several times throughout the school day to indicate it was time for the children to move to a different part of the classroom space for a change in subject and teacher.

The physical space of many of the classrooms Louise spent time in consisted of queues of shelves under the windows, rows of windows in every classroom, a blackboard at opposite ends to the windows, and individual desks in straight lines. Louise recollects either a little basket or a tray under the seat situated at each desk for storing school supplies and personal belongings. The walls were covered with instructional posters and charts such as alphabet posters in the early years; and maps and pictures related to social studies, and artwork in the upper year levels.

Her relationship with her teachers was not a close connection because, as Louise described, she was a quiet student who would not choose to get involved with them, "*I just did what I was told to do. I never stood out*" (Interview, July 27th, 2004). Louise has memories of all her teachers being active in the playground with the students, describes her teachers as all very good, and feels they were all there to do their job. She does remember two teachers specifically, both male teachers, who had a different approach toward schooling. Compared to Louise's experiences with strict and elderly female teachers, these Year 4 and Year 6 teachers were beginning their careers and brought with them such interactive approaches as having the desks in groups or semi-circles. Although Louise was not discouraged by a teacher's strictness or attitude toward their students, she did talk about the appeal of the male teachers in creating learning opportunities that were more interesting and exciting. For example, Louise described a football game her Year 6 class played for social studies at the end of each week. Her teacher would ask questions about the content learned and teams would work together to answer the questions. Louise felt her interest was piqued in the subject, as she was motivated to study the content more intensely, resulting in more memorable learning.

Both teachers also provided the opportunity for the students to ask questions and provided extra assistance when needed. In these classes, students were divided in three ability levels for mathematics and language arts. Louise spoke of this positively,

> *...we were divided into three groups - middle, lower and higher - so you were put into your ability rather than being stuck in the general class so you weren't struggling. There wasn't a teacher standing there saying 'You can do that, you know how to do that, now do it'. You were in with kids who were the same level so you weren't being left behind and pushed by any of them.*
> (Interview, July 27th, 2004)

It is interesting that with these memories in upper elementary, what Louise recalls as an experience in school in which she experienced feelings of success, occurred throughout Year 1. The teacher provided a structured, close-ended activity of tracing over textured letters.

> *I can always remember doing that, but not any specific letter or day or anything...as I remembered it I probably quite enjoyed it, it was probably the highlight of the day, getting to trace over the letters. Don't know why but I must have really looked forward to it for it to stick in my mind.*
> (Interview, July 27th, 2004)

As a student, Louise generally felt that she had few rights and suggested that it was the students' "right" to sit quietly and do their school work. While saying this, Louise remembers always being respected and students who required alternative pedagogical programs were well supported by other teachers in the district. She did not question the authority of the teacher in expecting the students' compliance and, on the rare occasions students did, they were sent to the principal's office. Other forms of punishment described by Louise involved the teacher chastising individuals in front of classmates and students having to remain behind after school to clean the blackboards or the chalk brushes. The threat of going to the principal and missing out on playing with friends at recess or after school was usually sufficient in influencing a student's behaviour.

As a student, Louise had the responsibility to be on time to school, to be ready with the right equipment and books and to have her homework completed. Other responsibilities in school included ensuring muddy footwear was replaced with a cleaner pair for indoors, and there was also the expectation that students would contribute to the general classroom discussion.

Louise's experience of schooling changed when she reached high school, with the teachers being more strict and less open to "joking" or "fun." Specifically, Louise recalls the science subject teachers as being more serious and describes these classes as one aspect she would like to change in her educational experience.

Louise attended college following high school and completed a program in Recreation Management, preparing her with the skills and knowledge to operate sports programs, fitness programs, swimming pools and ice rinks in towns and cities. One job she had was in the field of recreational management in a small town as the program coordinator implementing summer programs for the youth. As well as providing fitness and soccer programs, Louise assisted with operations of the swimming pool and ice-rink.

By chance, a building she was working in had a day care centre with a position opening and Louise applied for the job because it was convenient and provided extra income. Louise speaks fondly of being with the children in the day care centre but questions her role as carer or educator,

> *I really enjoyed being with the kids. I wish now that I had known what I know now about education and teaching. I could have done so much more with them. As it was we simply played. We didn't work on much education and I think that we could have. They would have benefited.*
> (Interview, August 17th, 2004)

Louise then backpacked around Australia and had taken a three-month job on a property when she met Daniel, her husband-to-be. Daniel had accepted contract work on the property helping with the shearing at the time Louise was there. The couple moved back and forth, living together in both Australia and North America. Employment opportunities for Daniel and the choice of a particular lifestyle brought them to permanently live in Queensland five or six years later. *"It was the lifestyle as opposed to the country. If you can find us a similar lifestyle in a greater climate, we'll be there"* (Louise, Interview, July 27th, 2004). Even though Louise has lived and worked in densely populated cities, she chose these locations based on their provision of natural parkland. She also chose these locations for their availability of places that afforded her some retreat from the noise the cities created and the people the cities attracted. Living on a property is fitting for Louise as she dislikes cities and crowds. It also suits her enjoyment of spending time with a small group of friends as opposed to larger numbers of people. She also loves animals and travelling.

Louise's next role working with children would involve educating her own two boys through a school of distance education program. Daniel and Louise knew they would enrol their children in this educational program because they had chosen to live and work on an isolated property over 150 kilometres from the closest elementary school.

About Thomas and Timothy

Thomas, 8, and Timothy, 7, were born 18 months apart and spend much of their spare time playing outdoors together. Although their personalities, work habits, thinking and interests can be very different, or "opposite" as their mother would describe, the boys do share common interests in trampolining, swimming, riding their bikes, and particular choices of movies, audio books and children's literature.

They also share enjoyment in playing football and watching the game on television on the weekends. While Timothy prefers to stay at home and play it, Thomas likes to go into town and join his football team. Timothy played in town during the year on a different team to his older brother but chose to spend some games on the sideline for a reason nobody knows. Louise reflected, "*We think he must have put excess mental pressure on himself. I hope we didn't put the pressure on as he does love to play football and is quite good. I just hope he keeps playing*" (Dialogue journal, July 25th, 2004). Timothy likes to play football at home with Thomas as long as some of the rules are changed. He plans on playing more games next year in town and would like the chance to beat the rival team. Thomas has experienced difficulty with one of his team mates' bossiness and attitude. Louise struggled with how to respond to the situation, "*The problem is it is one of his friends and I am not sure if I should tell his mother or hope the kids straighten him out. Maybe I will have a word with the coach at the next game and he can have a general discussion about good sportsmanship*" (Dialogue journal, July 25th, 2004).

Thomas' hero is a famous Australian football player. Timothy, however, describes his dad as his hero and would choose to spend time with him rather than being in school. Both siblings enjoy mustering with their dad [mustering is the movement of sheep, cattle, horses and goats using horses, trailers, motorbikes, vehicles or helicopters. Livestock are mustered for reasons such as: stock health and condition assessment and treatments, preparation for transport or sale or implementation of breeding strategies and plans.] Thomas and Timothy also enjoy putting out the "lick" for the cattle with their dad or the jackaroo [a man who is learning to work on a sheep or cattle station] and other kinds of property work. Thomas often surprises the jackaroo with what he can do, for example, his strength in lifting heavy things.

Another difficult thing Thomas has accomplished, from his perspective, is learning to ride a motorbike. When he first started on a smaller four-wheeler, he found it challenging to drive but now that he has learned, he finds it even easier on the bigger four-wheeler he now operates. Thomas loves motorbikes and guns. He would like to be able to shoots ducks so he could eat them; however, he is too young at present to use the appropriate gun. Thomas would enjoy spending some time in a gun store learning from someone who makes and cleans guns. While he likes being his age and being able to fit into places adults cannot (for example, reaching a spanner one day in a place his father couldn't) Thomas wishes he could do more things adults can do, like drive two wheel motorbikes.

Thomas began his schooling experience anxiously. For example, he spent many evenings worrying about school the next day and saying that he didn't want to go. Louise recalls Thomas expressing negative feelings toward the schoolroom experience, directly stating that he didn't like school or didn't like particular activities associated with school. Five years later he continues to resist the beginning of each school day and some of the activities the curriculum requires him to complete, although he generally participates in the formal school work. Over time Thomas has become increasingly cooperative. Louise is grateful that her son didn't give up and is continually learning and achieving success.

While Louise describes her two sons as "totally different", Timothy is beginning to demonstrate some of the behaviours and attitudes to formal schooling which are characteristic of Thomas. Timothy's growing resistance to school appears to be associated with feelings of boredom with aspects of the curriculum which are not interesting him or challenging him. Louise struggles to ensure that Timothy continues his love of learning, in particular his enjoyment of mathematics, by trying to keep him challenged by it. Thomas' overt dislike for school learning activities seems to discourage him from sharing what "school knowledge" he knows and what "school skills" he is capable of. Louise is conscious of the need for Thomas to orally discuss and work in a hands-on way with concepts, information or stories as he experiences difficulty in understanding what he has read.

Thomas does not readily express feelings of being upset or excited, while Timothy physically and verbally expresses his experiences and emotions eagerly. For example, both boys love spending time with the jackaroo on the property who is 19 years old. He divides his time and attention between the two boys; however, Timothy talks a lot about his time with the jackaroo, causing it to seem that Timothy is spending more time with him. Thomas spends just as much time with the worker but doesn't seem to have the need to tell everybody, even though he may have enjoyed the experience as much as his younger brother. Timothy is more expressive than Thomas and enjoys sharing his excitement about activities or events he has been involved in. This is evident during his on-air lessons also as he often shares news with his teacher and peers.

Thomas is of great assistance around the house, doing regular chores and other jobs. He also has been given and has accepted more responsibilities than his younger sibling. These include, for example, learning to drive the four-wheel drive, mowing the lawn, assisting in the cattle yards and independently using a pocket knife.

Timothy is excited about learning new factual information and also uses his extensive imagination to create play situations by himself. Like his older brother, Timothy enjoys being active. Thomas is interested in sports and is good at them. Timothy also enjoys sports but requires time and effort to practice the skills. In fact, Timothy can be seen kicking a ball for hours by himself, whereas Thomas would choose not to play football if no one else is there playing with him. Louise finds her two sons complement each other, *"It's good because they pull the one that's weak out. Thomas gets Timothy out there running around and Timothy gets Thomas imagining things where he normally wouldn't sit and play and imagine"* (Interview, August 17th, 2004).

The schoolroom

While looking at photographs taken in the Michaelson's schoolroom, Louise was asked if this place reminded her of anywhere that she has been or viewed before. Shaking her head and smiling, she responded, "*It's a one of a kind*!" (Interview, October 18th, 2004).

The schoolroom is a carpeted, small single building situated approximately 50 metres from the family's home. Not only does the enclosed veranda on one side of the building provide extra space, the wooden floors and gauzed-in sides provide warmth from the sun in the winter and shelter from the flies in the summer. During a few months of each year, finches build nests in one corner of the veranda's roof to hatch their eggs. The baby finches stay there and the Michaelson's observe them learning to fly. The birds have a beautiful whistle and are very busy finding food for their young.

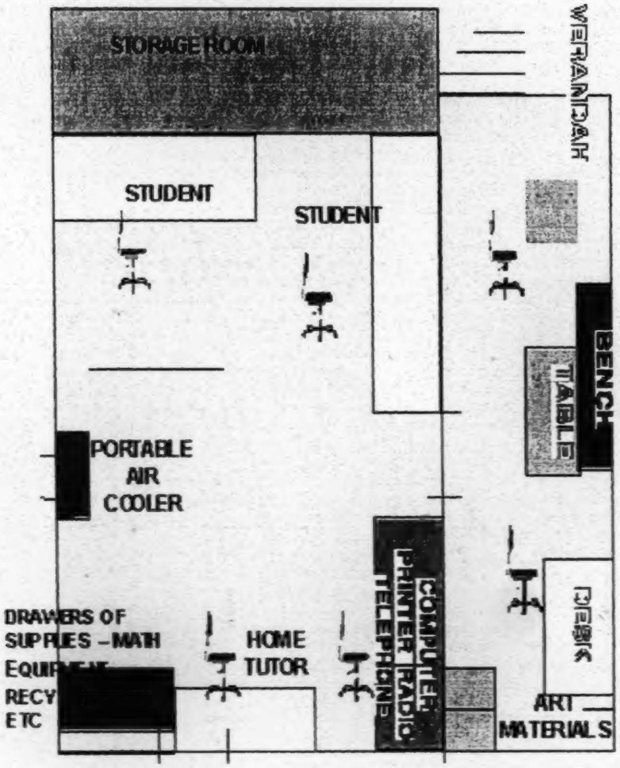

STORAGE ROOM
VERANDAH
STUDENT
STUDENT
BENCH
TABLE
PORTABLE
AIR
COOLER
COMPUTER
PRINTER RADIO
TELEPHONE
DESK
DRAWERS OF
SUPPLIES – MATH
EQUI
RECY
ETC
HOME
TUTOR
ART
MATERIALS

Figure 3. The Michaelson's schoolroom

Two louvered windows in the main building provide light and fresh air all year round. The windows are difficult to see out of and Louise prefers the boys not to sit in front of them because the rain comes in if it's at the right angle. Louise has her desk in front of the louvers as Thomas and Timothy leave their work and other resources on their desks, rather than in their drawers and these would be ruined in wet weather.

The walls of the schoolroom are covered with instructional posters and charts - shapes around us, world map, alphabet – printing and script, core word chart, calendar, colours, season wheel, number words, metre rule and number line, term planners near radio, types of writing, and the children's work – art, certificates and writing. Louise chooses the materials to be put on the walls and speaks of the printed materials as decoration and would like more if there was the wall space. The aesthetic appeal of the instructional posters and charts is both for the boys and for Louise. Thomas and Timothy tend to use the letter chart for guidance and to ask Louise for assistance rather than looking at the wall and finding the pictorial assistance or clues they need.

The arrangement of the schoolroom changes yearly. At the end of each year Louise, Thomas and Timothy clean and rearrange the desks and other contents. Louise feels the schoolroom is continually untidy "*because as soon as one paper is out of spot it looks disgusting*" (Interview, October 18th, 2004). Louise offers Thomas and Timothy the choice of where they would like to situate their desks; however the choice is limited due to the numerous power chords requiring access to power points. The computer remains in the same location because of the cords coming in to the schoolroom from the satellite dish. Also, the power points are all located in the one corner to save running cords across walls and under floors. All the technology in the one corner of the schoolroom has created some obstacles which Louise has overcome. With only an air cooler in the schoolroom, Louise ensures to remember to turn it on early enough so the computer remains cool for the morning session of their school day. The family avoids using the computer later in the day. Now that Thomas and Timothy are older, they participate in on-air by themselves and Louise works with whoever is not on-air for 30 minutes of individual time. Louise does keep the volume of the radio at a level she can still hear to monitor her sons' participation in, and understanding of, the lesson. The tape recorder has earphones which the boys find uncomfortable so Louise asks them to close the door and to turn the volume down on the tape they are listening to. Louise, Thomas and Timothy will all join in on the activity if it's a song that they can all sing along to, or dance or move to.

Louise is also attentive to the position of the boys' desks in terms of behaviour management, "*…having to squish them together so they are interfering with each other all the time…Timothy's chatter, constantly talking. It's very difficult telling him to be quiet. Not much you can do about it, with his chattering*" (Interview, August 17th, 2004). Louise has found the increase of computer work has increased the level of distraction in the schoolroom as two forms of communication and learning technology are situated together and sometimes both boys require to be using the radio or the computer at the same time. Thomas' desk location helps him concentrate on his own school work as he cannot view the computer on the other side of the opened schoolroom door. He also has a wall in front and on his left side. Louise is constantly on the move from the boys' desks inside or the two desks on the veranda. There are times she may sit, for example, during morning notices or a longer discussion with either of the boys about a topic in their curriculum papers, however Louise rarely sits in her chair or at her desk.

Louise speaks of the schoolroom as small and dreams of an expansion or new space which has a separate room for the radio and computer, separate from the desk space where Thomas and Timothy are sitting and working. There is a room attached to one end of the schoolroom at the bottom of the stairs which would require air-conditioning for use during the summer. Louise cannot envisage the schoolroom changing in the near future, yet remains appreciative that it is situated in a separate building from the house,

> *It's good, if it had been in the house it would have been unworkable for Thomas, there would have been too many interruptions. He needs that away, separate building. The phone can't interrupt us unless it's a school call because generally only the school's got that number. A couple of other people do and they only phone in emergencies. It's good, being active outdoor children, we spend a lot of time out of the schoolroom like sitting on the veranda...they work so much better working out as opposed to in, except in the summer when you've got the cooler on.* (Interview, July 27th, 2004)

Beginning experiences of distance education

In her first job experiences in Australia Louise worked with men and became accustomed to their interests and topics of conversation. At parties, she found herself having nothing in common with the ladies and would rather talk to the men. Since beginning her role as a home tutor, Louise reflects,

> *Now that you're in this situation you need a friend you can call every now and then and it helps if they are in the same age level so you can say "how did you go with this activity or how did you do that?" I've got more friends and you're communicating more.* (Interview, August 17th, 2004)

As preparation for her role as home tutor and beginning the first year of Preschool with Thomas, Louise constantly phoned another parent. She found a friend and confidant in a home tutor who had several children, many years of experience with home schooling, and was active in the school community. Louise knew that one of the home tutor's children demonstrated a reluctance to school that Thomas did. Even though this parent employed a governess, Louise felt that she understood the behaviours Thomas was demonstrating. Louise turned to her friend for answers about ideas for responding to those behaviours. Louise also learned through her friend about some of the community roles, such as area representatives and sports representatives who she could contact for information as she was not familiar with the routines and expectations related to school-organized events.

Louise acknowledges that Preschool was a less demanding and stressful experience for her because the thematic kits were easy to follow and implement, and the school of distance education teachers guided Louise by giving feedback on the learning opportunities she was providing Thomas. However, Louise admits that, even though she and Daniel knew Thomas had a difficult temperament, she did not anticipate the school learning process to be so hard, "*We'll try and if it doesn't work then we'll have to get somebody' sort of thing… it's more, not necessarily the job that's hard but the child is hard, his lack of interest, him doing it*" (Interview, August 17th, 2004). It was not until Louise communicated more with other home tutors that she thought no other person had days as bad as she did with Thomas. The early days with distance education were not positive for Louise and she existed in the schoolroom on a day-by-day basis. As she describes further, "*Stressful, probably because I started with Thomas and he hates it. Everyday was a battle, every day was an argument, and everyday was a push. There wasn't a lot he did enjoy in it. It was just a real struggle*" (Interview, August 17th, 2004). Through communication with other families enrolled in distance education, she slowly came to realize that if she was having a bad day then she also knew there were a hundred other people out there who were possibly also having a similar experience. For Louise, this understanding now provides her with a sense of belonging in the school community as "*You feel much more involved if you know what is happening*" (Interview, September 6th, 2004). She is now a vice president of a community division of a state-wide organization helping families who are living in small rural communities. Furthermore, Louise's learning experiences are reflected in how she assists new families. For example, last year as area representative, Louise ensured she phoned all the new home tutors before the first cluster and before the first sports skills day to ensure they were aware of what pre-planning could be involved, what could be expected and what kinds of things could be happening.

Five years later, Louise's teaching and learning with Thomas has become more positive through consistent expectations from Daniel and Louise, and the establishment of a consistent routine,

> *...school is the priority here, there is no excuse to go and do anything else until school is done and they know that. It's been drilled into them that nothing comes ahead of school and they just know they have to get in and get it done.* (Interview, August 17th, 2004)

A portrait of everyday life

The Michaelson's weekdays begin with Daniel rising and leaving for work before the heat of the day makes its presence known. Louise enjoys a morning walk and finishes some chores around the house before crossing through the house yard and over to the schoolroom a few minutes before 8.00 a.m. On her morning walk with the dogs, Louise wonders about the day ahead as she notices an s-bend in the road,

> *when I see it I think this is what today is going to be, twisted, it goes down into a creek as well, it's going to twist and turn and go up and down. You know where the end is but you've got to get there and don't know what is along the way. That's just every-day. You don't know how they are going to come into school.* (Interview, October 18th, 2004)

The start of the school day for Louise, Thomas and Timothy begins with the broadcast of the school of distance education's morning notices. Once per week the mailman arrives in a four-wheel drive and stops outside the schoolroom. Louise greets him as he stays in the car. The boys expect their weekly candy treat before the mailman continues his drive to other families in the district. Thomas and Timothy are familiar with their responsibilities and the routines in the schoolroom, however, they need reminding, encouraging and coercing into fulfilling and following these. While Louise listens to morning notices, the boys have a choice of completing a puzzle, reading a book or beginning their first session of language arts [LAC 1 - curriculum materials focused on the subject area of English and activities for specifically teaching and learning about such things as reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing, shaping, generic structure, vocabulary and pronunciation.] The time following morning notices is hurried for Timothy as he continues with journal writing or the LAC curriculum activities. Attention is given to the time as it draws near to 9.00 a.m. when his teacher calls on the telephone for reading. As soon as the telephone produces sound, Louise and Thomas call "Timothy, telephone reading." He participates in his on-air lesson, responding to questions but mainly calling in to share a comment or his experiences. While Louise chooses to leave the boys to participate by themselves on-air, she listens and monitors their attention. The static in the reception makes hearing all of their peers impossible most days and it is tempting for Thomas and Timothy to play with any objects close by. Timothy enjoys on-air, especially when his class does science and art. Actually, any time throughout the school day when he can do art and science is enjoyable for Timothy. He appreciates Louise's help during on-air as her participation makes these activities more memorable and he is excited by the idea of telephone lessons beginning as the reception will be a lot clearer with no static.

While Timothy is working with his school of distance education teacher, Thomas reluctantly continues with spelling, grammar or journal writing. The family's morning break, "smoko", is at 9.30 a.m. [smoko is a short break from work, usually in the morning between breakfast and lunch, or in the afternoon between lunch and dinner. Similar to the term 'recess' used in North America.] Smoko fits into the on-air schedule set by the school, therefore, Timothy works for another 15 minutes following his telephone reading session.

If either of the boys finishes what Louise believes they should, they can go for smoko without her and their sibling. This is also the case at the end of the school day. After a 30-minute break, they race back to the schoolroom for Timothy's on-air lesson. While they are physically removed from the schoolroom, Louise often discusses things with the boys about what needs to be done when they return or spend smoko time completing an added assignment given by the school of distance education teacher during on-air.

The school day has many changes of pace for Thomas and he requires time for adjustment between activities. For example, following his on-air lesson at 11.00 a.m., he wanders around and fiddles with various objects before settling into the mathematics work. During on-air Thomas' teacher keeps him on task by calling him in if he hasn't contributed or responded to each discussion or activity.

It is a busy and longer session after the morning break as mathematics and the second session of language arts [LAC 2 - Curriculum materials focused on the theme introduced in LAC1 and integrated with the subject areas of Science, Health, Art, Music, Physical Education and Social Studies] need to be finished before having lunch and finishing school for the day. Both Thomas and Timothy know they are really good at mathematics but Timothy is not enjoying it at the moment. If he could change an aspect of his school day to make it better, he would not do mathematics and handwriting. Thomas would like to include more "fun" activities at school like playing football.

Timothy talks while completing his work and is often asked to be quiet by Thomas or to concentrate on his work by Louise. Louise is attentive to the personal physical space Thomas prefers to have to complete his work. Both the inside of the schoolroom and the veranda are used by Thomas and Timothy. Usually they choose where they would like to be to complete their school work and are moved only if they are verbally or physically annoying one another. If Thomas is being cooperative and productive, he will only ask Louise for assistance before he goes onto the next activity and otherwise he works alone. Louise will sometimes write for Thomas when the focus is on his understanding and not his ability to construct sentences, for example. Thomas has also begun to ask if he can type rather than write some tasks. Sometimes he complains of activities requiring completion on the computer although he is quite confident in using the skills he has learned during his school computer lessons. For example, Thomas is asked by Louise to demonstrate processes to Timothy, such as sending an email to his teacher. Thomas enjoys listening to music and Louise allows this to be played if he is able to continue working well.

Louise walks between Thomas and Timothy quite continuously and rarely sits down. Much of Louise's interactions with the boys are conducted standing next to them as they sit. In the moments both boys are working independently without requiring Louise's assistance or attention, Louise reviews the home tutor guides. She can remember most of the curriculum requirements and knows what each of her sons are required to do in each activity. Louise will check the home tutor guide further if she is introducing a new concept in science, mathematics or social studies. This helps her to initiate a discussion and to understand what prior knowledge or skills the children have.

Louise raises her voice when she is frustrated with Thomas and Timothy's unwillingness to complete a task. She uses humour and sarcasm to motivate the boys. For example, when Thomas was unwilling to write in his journal, Louise suggested he write, "*First I said I can't, then I said I can't, and then I sent a blank page to my teacher*" (Green, field notes, 2004). Everyone in the schoolroom laughed. Louise also rewards the boys with a sticker for their sticker chart for entire sessions completed well and with little fuss. Another strategy to change the children's behaviour is to threaten them with not being able to do something after school, such as Thomas losing his bike or his privilege of using the house computer to play games. Louise's day in the schoolroom is spent multi-tasking, for example, listening to the radio while the boys are on-air and working with the son not on-air. She plans games to play with Thomas and Timothy as a break between the curriculum work or at the end of the school day. If both boys are playing, Louise adjusts the level of difficulty of the games. The games come from either the school library, from resources made by Louise from the curriculum packs or an outdoor activity such as passing a ball and answering number facts.

Louise has never skipped an entire day of curriculum work, with any days missed caught up when Louise, Thomas and Timothy were back in the schoolroom. Because of the sequencing of the curriculum activities, Louise believes it would be difficult to continue if one day was missed. The weekday routine is much the same each day in the schoolroom until formal school work is completed around 1 p.m. Timothy would like to finish every school day with art because now he only does it on Fridays occasionally or as a one-off project integrated into the curriculum papers. Thomas' favourite part of the school day is leaving in the afternoon.

After school, the family has lunch together before Louise completes the remainder of her chores to uphold the housework and the garden. She makes a point of spending time with her children in the late afternoon playing football and other outside games. Some days Thomas and Timothy spend the afternoon with their father mustering, on a lick run or sorting cattle in the yards. Thomas dislikes returning to the schoolroom for his extra-curricular recorder and chess lesson two afternoons per week.

The boys' nightly chore is to feed the dogs and they will often help their mother with dinner by doing such things as cutting the vegetables for the salad, making the garlic butter for the bread or mixing the ingredients for the pudding (their speciality is adding green food colouring to a vanilla pudding!) Before dinner is served, the boys take their showers. Their nightly story routine is to read a book to their mother or father and then have a book read to them.

On the weekends during the winter, one day is spent attending Thomas and Timothy's football match in a town two hours from the family's property. The family also enjoys going to community events such as the horse races and spending time with friends, all involving a substantial amount of travel time. Louise and Daniel discussed their commitment to all the driving as Thomas approached his Preschool year. Louise shares their decision-making,

> *If we start, like the sport, are we going to do all the extras that the school puts on, because you can't start them one year and then say to the kids that no it's too much this year we're not doing it. So that first year when they all came up we discussed it, did we want to commit to all that driving or were we just going to pull the kids. But with Thomas he so desperately needed the interaction that we just said yeah. We've brought them up out here; we've got to provide them with the socialization that's available for them. You hop in and you drive!*
> (Interview, July 27th, 2004)

Louise admits that the driving becomes daunting in the winter months when sports and community events are mostly scheduled. Unlike in the summer when the family stays home for four or five weeks at a time, the winter months often involve weekly trips to town. The school community and its associated events are another opportunity for socialization and other learning experiences for the Michaelson family. Louise ensures she attends so that Timothy and Thomas learn to interact with children their age and to listen to and take instructions from other adults.

> *I'm not big on art so, they love their art so the only place they get it is at sports skills and minischool, or cultural camps, something provided by the school. I very much believe that just because they live out here doesn't mean that they have to be hillbillies, or country bumpkins. I think that if the opportunity is there then we've really got to provide it for them.*
> (Interview, July 27th, 2004)

Most weekends Daniel has work to do such as collecting cattle from the neighbours one hour drive away. Generally, the family finds time for rest and relaxation. Louise invests at least two hours each weekend to each set of curricula, becoming familiar with the activities, equipment and resources needed and the expectations outlined. As the years have passed Louise has realized the benefit of crossing out the grammar that's in Thomas' workbook as the school of distance education has replaced that work with a different program. She also searches for and organises additional mathematical activities for Timothy in preparation for the week ahead. Every now and then, Louise is required to spend time with one of the boys on the weekend to complete a school-related activity, usually a project or published genre. Working with only one of her children, Louise finds the task easier to finish.

Louise enrolled Thomas and Timothy in boy scouts when she read about it in the school newsletter as she felt the boys would enjoy the program. They each received their own books and receive a phone call on a Sunday from the group leader in Brisbane. Thomas and Timothy were excited about the possibility of going to a camp the following year.

Reflections on the home educating experience

For Louise, teaching and learning with Timothy and Thomas in the family's schoolroom presents continued challenges, rewards and satisfactions. Support for Louise comes in various forms, such as her husband and other home tutors, and is an important ingredient for her to be able to teach her children in a way she perceives as satisfactory.

Louise has both good days and bad days in the schoolroom. She does find satisfaction in her teaching role, especially when Thomas or Timothy have grasped a new concept or become excited about something they are learning. A comment from the teacher, or an encouragement award given to one of the boys recognizing an achievement, are also rewarding for Louise. Louise expresses concern that she is never aware of what kind of job she is doing because she rarely has the opportunity to compare her children to others of the same age. She continually questions,

> *if they know enough, if you've taught them enough, if they are behind. It's really hard to judge where they are and therefore you never totally relax and say 'We're going all right' cause you don't know if you're going all right. So you're constantly pushing and they say that distance education students get pushed harder for that fact.* (Interview, August 17th, 2004)

School-planned events can be an obstacle, depending where they fall in a unit; however Louise ensures she plans ahead by completing extra school work each day or making use of each Friday. Extra assignments given by the school of distance education teachers during on-air lessons as "homework" also present Louise with the need to add that in to the regular work for that day. Louise describes poor radio reception as a very big obstacle for most of the year, which causes frustrations and moodiness among the three occupants in the schoolroom. It is hoped that the telephone will make a difference to the lessons simply for the fact that they will be able to hear the teacher and other students.

Louise also struggles with not having adequate time and knowledge to plan extra work or adapt the current curriculum to meet Timothy's needs and interests. She is challenged by,

> *keeping Timothy going in maths and thinking that he is getting something out of it because I don't always know that he is. It's a bit of a challenge trying to keep the program up to him. I don't have the time. Putting the time that needs to go into it is really difficult, along with everything else.* (Interview, August 17th, 2004)

When the two VISE tutors were teaching in the schoolroom, Louise noticed Timothy was happier with the language arts activities as his tutor had the time to plan alternative work for him. In her observation, Louise was aware that the VISE tutors and her children were involved in more "fun" activities, breaking from the regular demands of the curriculum because a 1:1 ratio creates further possibilities.

Louise brings many helpful attributes to her teaching role in the schoolroom: patience (which, by the end of the year is a lot shorter than at the start of the year); flexibility to alter routines because of changes from the school; creativity in finding resources and supporting her children in art; organization, the ability to step back from the learning to encourage her children's ideas and own work, and understanding in seeing how the pieces all come together. Louise also brings a practical perspective to school learning,

> *I'm a bit like Thomas - you do it and get it done, you do it day after day. I don't examine it, thinking what has it got me or what hasn't it got me, or what am I getting from it. You've got to keep learning, as soon as you stop learning you get very bored so it's very important to make sure you're learning a little bit to get more ideas and that you're teaching the kids the same concept, that it is important to learn. That they're learning and wanting to learn.*
> (Interview, August 17th, 2004)

In addition to communicating with several other home tutors in the same year level, Louise also has the support of her husband. Daniel also believes that school comes first and respects the routine of the school day. Louise shared stories of other women who are told by their husbands to immediately stop what they are doing in school and come out and help them with work related to the management of the property. On occasion, Daniel has asked for help, but only when it fits into the school schedule, otherwise it would be a difficult task to return to the schoolroom with Thomas.

Louise has also found the school of distance education teaching and support staff helpful to her in her home tutor role and always available and willing to be there for her. Louise was surprised by,

> *The fact that you can just say HELP and they're there. I guess because they're not here you don't really expect that they're always at the end of the phone. And it didn't matter who you got, be it the library, the computer or whatever they're all*

> *always there just to help you out, which was good. I can't imagine being in a school where that wasn't available, cause I think that it would be very hard to, as you are doing your work you sort of need it then because it's in the middle of something and you really need to know that answer then. I mean obviously some things can wait to talk through to a teacher or some things you can wait to talk it through. They're very good that way.* (Interview, July 27th, 2004)

Louise feels comfortable communicating with staff about a wide range of topics such as concepts presented in the curriculum or asking for the list of resources they have borrowed from the library. She reflects that this is due to the message sent by teachers to parents – they can phone in whenever they need and not to feel like they're interrupting anything. Louise prefers using the telephone for communicating with the school as opposed to emailing. If Louise emails a staff member in the morning and they do not answer until the afternoon, she will not receive the message until the next morning. Furthermore, many of the conversations Louise seeks from the school of distance education staff are about questions or concerns requiring an immediate response at the time of completing an activity. Louise commends the school of distance education for fostering good communication between families and school staff.

Louise appreciates morning notices and believes this time and space is important to foster community. She also believes the Parents and Citizens' Association has a strong relationship with the school, both listening to each other's concerns and opinions. "*I think that you have to have that for people to feel like they belong and for things to run smoothly*" (Interview, July 27th, 2004).

School-organized events are another source of support for Louise. She places so much importance on attending the cluster days that the family planned to return early from their September holiday so they could spend the day at cluster before going home.

Louise spent the day at cluster with her children, drove two hours to get home that evening and then spent the following day washing, checking the gardens and cleaning cupboards to put a an entire car and trailer of food into them. On Sunday, Louise then travelled 40 kilometres to complete a full-day first aid course before beginning the week in the schoolroom with Thomas and Timothy the following day. Both of the boys enjoy cluster and so does their mother, for different reasons,

> *I tend to enjoy them because it's a chance to talk to the mothers, get new ideas, you discover that your child is not the only one who had this problem or didn't want to do that. It makes a big difference because you just don't see how other kids are doing and that's the one complaint that I find difficult with distance education is not being able to just compare, just have an idea, am I pushing them too hard, am I letting them slack off too much, where should they be to be average as such with the work.* (Interview, July 27th, 2004)

Louise has developed a confidence in relation to the school, the operations and what's happening each term due to her five years of experience. She would not change anything about the school of distance education's program, except to move it closer to where her family lives!

Sharing views on education, goals and hopes

The most important thing Louise believes her children can acquire from their educational experience is not singular, but reflects a puzzle, with all the pieces working together. Louise hopes her children will be happy, healthy and motivated to do what they choose in life without being sidetracked by drugs, alcohol or crime. Timothy believes the important things in life are food, water, exercise and energy. Thomas would like to have respect and friendship in his life. During the next year, Timothy's concentration is on achievements in football while Thomas would like to try surfing. He has been on a boogie board before but the waves were not big enough so he is hoping when they go on holidays they will find some waves. When asked what goals she hopes Thomas and Timothy will strive for, Louise turns to the present day.

> *…I'm happy if they strive to get a unit finished in two weeks, and get all their spelling done. That's a hard one for them, to get all their spelling words right. Timothy is more likely to set himself goals, whereas Thomas is not that competitive, he's just happy to go along and do things as they come. Whereas Timothy will say I'm going to kick the ball 20 times a day over the wall and he'll do it until he does it, whereas Thomas couldn't be bothered to set a goal and work for it.* (Interview, August 17th, 2004)

She hopes they will have the strength to defend themselves and to achieve their own goals.

CHAPTER 6

THE CARSON FAMILY

Kate and John and their two daughters, Emma 13, and Melissa 10, live on the family's sheep and cattle property in Western Queensland.

About Kate

Kate was born in the area in the early 1960's and lived there until going to boarding school in Year 7, returning home each school holiday. Kate's grandfather inherited the sheep property she grew up on from her great grandfather. When Kate's father married Kate's mother, a cottage was built for the newly weds and for seven years the extended family (Kate has three siblings) lived together until her grandfather retired. The property was sold in 2004 by Kate's parents who had lived and worked there for over forty years. Kate has many fond memories of outdoor activities with her family, including fishing at Easter time and swimming in the dam after sleeping off a generous cold Christmas lunch. Kate's family were also football fans and would travel into town each Sunday afternoon in winter to watch the local game together on a rug at one end of the football field.

Drought also brought difficult times. Kate remembers having to hand-feed all of the sheep with her grandfather, putting out mixtures of grain in troughs and beeping the horn of the old Landrover to alert the sheep to come to the food. Time has repeated itself as Kate and John shared a similar experience in 2003 with the usual summer flooding not arriving, sheep and cattle having to be sold and trucked out, and the remaining stock being fed with loads of cottonseed and molasses.

Kate began Year 1 in the 1960s and her first memories of school involve her parents arguing with each other about the best way to erect the school of the air aerial. The aerial was extremely tall, having to reach several hundred kilometres away to a town in which the school of the air was transmitting in its first year. Although Kate was one of the first students using the broadcast, she has no recollections of using the radio in her two-year enrolment at the school of the air.

In Year 3, Kate's mother and father made the decision for her to board in the local town at the hostel during the week to attend the public school. Part of the reason Kate stayed at the hostel for five years and attended the local school was due to the community's decision to send their children to town rather than enrol in distance education.

> *Everyone decided, at the moment everybody is doing distance education, but there was a hostel in [town] until last year but it closed down because there weren't people using it, but if we'd all made the decision that state school education was the way to go then it would probably still be going. It was just a group mentality thing. There were so many other kids there with me from other properties; I had a brilliant time for five years.* (Interview, August 2nd, 2004)

The other reason for the popularity of the hostel and public school education was the lack of support for the home tutors in those years. Kate recounted that her mother had come to this region of Queensland as a governess and therefore possessed some teaching skills and knowledge when beginning her home education experience with Kate. When her mother wrote to the staff at the Primary Correspondence School in Brisbane asking the reason for teaching her daughter certain content or skills, she would receive a response suggesting that she didn't need to know the details of teaching approaches or curriculum content. Kate's mother was told, "Just do it"; a message suggesting that she should not question the correspondence school's authority. Hence, Kate tells of her mother's amazement toward the support and help home tutors presently receive.

Kate vividly remembers a variety of experiences from her years as a student. Some of these memories are negative, for example, in Kate's words,

> *I am a chronic chewer of pencils, I still chew my pens and in those days my mother was really worried about me chewing pencils. I suppose she thought I was going to die of lead poisoning. And she must have talked to teachers about what to do to stop me doing it and I remember one teacher, I think it was Year 6, making rabbit ears and putting them on my head and I'd have to wear them in class.* (Interview, August 2nd, 2004)

Other more positive memories include Kate's Year 7 teacher, whom she had a good relationship with. This teacher helped Kate to understand mathematics for the very first time, specifically, he taught Kate an interesting way of doing division,

> *I still do my division differently to everyone else. I can't teach my kids how to do division but he taught me a way and I could finally understand it all. I just remember this teacher, as being somebody who I thought understood me.* (Interview, August 2nd, 2004)

Kate attended a non-traditional setting in her final two years of elementary school prior to leaving for high school in a coastal city. The classroom was an open area; the space was used deliberately to move students into groupings based both on their ability levels and the subject being taught. The previous elementary school had old furniture and the wooden desks with lift up tops were all in rows.

> *It could have been more colourful, definitely could have been more colourful. I don't think people in primary school had too much welcoming about it. It was just a place you went to listen to teachers, write down what was on the blackboard. It wasn't very welcoming.* (Interview, August 2nd, 2004)

When Kate began boarding school in Brisbane, the classrooms spaces were more modern and cleaner; however, she struggled with settling in for many years. Although happy to be going to a co-educational high school, Kate found herself the only student who came from as far west in Queensland as she did. She couldn't go home on the weekends like her peers whose families lived closer to the city where the boarding school was located.

> *I don't think that they had had a lot of experience with a lot of really bush kids. But that was mainly my fault, even being in town I wasn't the sort of person who wanted to know what the latest music was, the latest dresses, fashions or stuff so that didn't stand me in good stead when I went to boarding school. So I was right out of it.* (Interview, August 2nd, 2004)

Rather, Kate was interested in reading, a love she has always remembered being an important aspect of her life.

> *When I went to the hostel it was something that local people who know me still laugh about that on the way to school they'd walk along and find Kate sitting on a suitcase on the edge of the street, like I couldn't look up long enough to cross the road, so they'd help me cross the road and then I'd just read walking down the footpath to school and back again.* (Interview, August 2nd, 2004)

Much of her time at boarding school was filled with reading also, along with weekends of playing sport, attending functions, window-shopping and going to the movies.

Kate does not recall any adult talking to her about her rights as a student during her schooling years. She does recall learning about responsibilities in secondary school. Kate and her peers were told what to do and were expected to do it. The students' responsibility was not to break any of the rules or bounds. It was their responsibility to abide by the rules if they planned to continue their education at the boarding school. Kate received the cane one time for something she does not remember, but does bring to mind feelings of pride toward the experience of the principal physically punishing her with the cane.

Kate was yet to explore her career options fully when she began university. Kate remained unsure about what she wanted to do with her life until halfway through her Arts degree when she realized she was majoring in what was right for her -- journalism. Kate had enrolled in the course to utilize her skills in English, thinking also she would be able to make use of her university degree one day. "*I just fell into the right thing. Maybe my mother helped me out a little bit, prodded me into the right direction*" (Interview, August 2nd, 2004). After Kate graduated with her Arts degree, she returned to the region of Queensland she calls home and successfully applied for a part-time journalist position in town.

While working for a second newspaper, Kate met John and was married around the time her in-law's bought the property they now live on and manage with their two daughters. The first years of living on the property were before fax machines had been invented and party line phones were still operating. Kate's journalist career in writing for the newspaper was affected because of communication barriers so she spent her time with John living and working on the property.

Kate reflects that it was her mother that guided her career into journalism and it is her mother that has influenced who she is as a community member. Both women have given of their time, effort, knowledge and research skills, with Kate volunteering for such projects as community works, historic ventures and refurbishments, conferences, accepting the role of executive positions in various societies and school-related organizations, and generally making her community a better place to live. Kate believes that smaller communities in rural areas need that sort of contribution to survive and thrive. She admires anybody who contributes to the community and benefits others without thinking about what they can get back or what reward they will receive. Although Kate would not consider John F. Kennedy a role model, she does keep in mind his famous speech, including, "Ask not what your country can do for you, instead think of what you can do for your country." This is the way Kate strives to live her life.

During the seven years before her eldest daughter was born, Kate observed her friends in the community and anticipated that, although she had never planned on being an educator of children,

> *...this mysterious thing was coming along. I'd gone to 'Bachelor and Spinster's Balls' and polo cross, everything in my single days with all my friends and they'd all got married and I could see them all having children and distance education was the way to go. I was watching them go to their clusters, those odd things in town during the day, and see them talking about their sports carnivals and everything and it was just sort of ingrained into me I guess that distance education, this mysterious thing was coming along.*
> (Interview, August 2nd, 2004)

Kate has been teaching and learning for nine years. Emma is in Year 8 attending the same boarding school as her mother did in Brisbane and Melissa is in Year 5.

About Melissa

Melissa is a creative 10 year old whose strongest interest is in art. Melissa also takes pleasure in completing game and jigsaw puzzles, and spending time with her pet animals – a horse, a dog, lovebirds, guinea pigs and chickens. When she experiences boredom, Melissa's first choice would be to read, jump on the trampoline or to ride her horse. If given the opportunity Melissa would love to spend time with an Olympic athlete who has participated in 3-day equestrian events. She feels she could learn much from an equestrian athlete about learning how to pace herself against a jump and how to take off at the right distance from a jump. She would also love to spend time with an artist and learn how to sketch, draw cartoons, or to make something in her art more realistic.

Netball, swimming and athletics are sports Melissa participates in throughout the year. She has been successful in representing her school and district in such events as long-distance running and discus. Melissa has also earned selection on the Central West team for netball. This is an achievement she felt was very difficult as there were so many girls trying out for the team. Melissa also feels she is "*…really good at polo cross and netball*" (Interview, August 30th, 2004). She has scored a goal at a gymkhana playing polo cross even though it was challenging to ride with one hand steering the horse and the other hand used to score the goal.

Although Melissa sometimes expresses a dislike of reading during school time, she can often be found reading her own choice of books in a quiet part of the house. In fact if she were to have more spare time, Melissa would choose to do more art, sports, sleepovers with her friends and reading. She likes to read adventure stories and mysteries and does not like non-fiction books.

Outside the schoolroom, Melissa is involved in activities she chooses and enjoys. Many of these activities are open-ended activities which positively challenge her and which bring her satisfaction and pride. There is more room for mistakes, less adult (or curriculum) input for how things should be completed, and more space for inquiry and exploration.

Kate experienced teaching and learning with Emma as easier when comparing the ease with which the girls grasped new concepts. Melissa struggles with many new concepts, requiring more time for thinking and reflection. Melissa appears to understand new mathematical concepts first concretely. Melissa responds to visual representations of numbers, such as ink stamps of base ten blocks and a mathematics card to manipulate for multiplying by ten.

Melissa began telephone reading in Year 3 and has just finished reading the fifth "Harry Potter" book. Kate attributes Melissa's enjoyment and confidence in reading to the school of distance education's telephone reading program. Melissa continues to struggle with following a text, and she often reads above or below the lines which also causes difficulty in spelling and letter formation. When Melissa was younger, writing was quite a challenge for her and, although her writing has improved and her enjoyment of writing has increased, she still has days when she states her dislike of it. Melissa's journal entries are interesting to read and can be humorous. Furthermore, in a unit of work in Term 3 of 2004, Melissa had a large number of story ideas brimming out of her when working with the VISE tutor. As well as being inspired by the VISE tutor, the topic was funny and Melissa loves humour in her life and responds well to it.

With Emma at boarding school, Kate has noticed some differences in Melissa, no longer the younger sister compared with her elder sibling, or the second daughter sharing her parents' attention. John invites Melissa to accompany him in the afternoons or on weekends, requiring Melissa to take on a lot of responsibility. John provides her with positive feedback also about how she is assisting him, which makes her feel good about herself and has improved her self- esteem. Melissa enjoys her sister's company when she is home for the holidays, even though she finds her annoying, just like mosquitos buzzing around her ears at night in summer and she cannot go to sleep. Melissa knows that she can be annoying also, especially when she would like to go down to the river with Emma and make a cubby. Sometimes Emma would prefer to stay at home and read a book so Melissa coerces her with all the benefits of accompanying her to the river. The hardest part about being younger than her sister is that Emma can boss her around a lot but she also misses learning at home with her sister, as learning was more fun when she could tease Emma at times.

Melissa is presently influenced by her peers regarding decisions about what she would like to do when she grows up. She does have a passion for animals and enjoys the idea of extreme sports such as skydiving and going in hot-air balloons. When given the opportunity at a theme park, Melissa challenges herself with the terrifying rollercoasters! One of the best times she had with her mother was going on a rollercoaster together because Kate is afraid of heights. Melissa remembers the fun they had talking about the experience afterwards.

Melissa asks her parents questions and shares her understandings about all sorts of topics. For example, Melissa remains puzzled about how the world was created, and has questions about what is at the other side of the universe or does the universe just keep going. She enjoys the feeling of surprise when she learns something interesting about nature and how different creatures can be. For example, just the other day she discovered that slugs have 20 brains! Melissa also likes to daydream about flying over her property or becoming a different animal like a bird, dog or horse. During the dry months of the year, Melissa also worries if the drought is going to end or if it is ever going to rain because the land provides her family with income.

Melissa also likes to share with her parents what she has done with her friends when they have spent time together. Melissa has many friends of different ages she keeps in contact with through email, having come to know them through her sister's interactions with their siblings and her own participation at school or community events. She imagines that in a regular school it would be great to be able to stay after school to chat with her friends.

The schoolroom

The Carson's schoolroom is five metres from the house, a separate building with an attached bathroom and laundry. The space reflects elements of a regular primary classroom – writing tools and equipment, desks, calendars, students' workbooks and folders of information and completed work in piles. Furthermore, the walls and large cupboard doors are partially covered with instructional posters and charts - times tables, two large THRASS charts, a number board, calendar, flags of the world, writing styles, the human body, many definitions of parts of speech, and examples too, and an adopt-a-hero information page from the Olympic Games. Kate enjoyed displaying Emma and Melissa's artwork during their early years of primary school because there was so much of it. Now there is less art incorporated into the curriculum work and many of those pieces are required to be sent into the school of distance education. Kate makes an effort to decorate the schoolroom at the beginning of every year yet confesses as the year goes by she loses her enthusiasm.

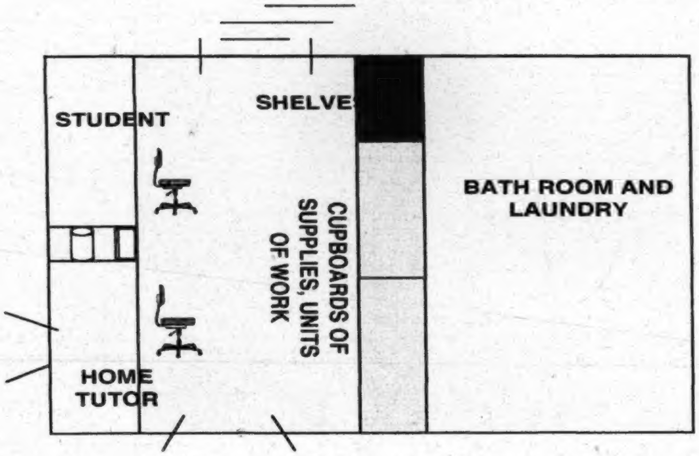


Figure 4. The Carson's schoolroom

The space "downstairs" from the house has always been the schoolroom. As Kate explains,

> *I wanted somewhere where I didn't have interruptions all the time, somewhere where the kids could feel like they were going off to school. The shearer's quarters were another alternative but I would have had to clear it out at shearing time. Really that was the only other place that was out of the …I was quite lucky that it was out of the house a little bit and that there was a spare room down there.* (Interview, August 2nd, 2004)

John has been suggesting using the space as another form of accommodation for casual workers but Kate defends her need for it for a few more years. The schoolroom is small, even more so with three bodies present, but Kate feels it serves it purpose. An art area out on the veranda off one side of the house has been created to provide extra space. Also, the schoolroom is extended into the office in the house as the computer and radio are located there. The office is an enclosed section of the veranda with access from John and Kate's bedroom and the family's bathroom.

The physical layout of the schoolroom affects its arrangement. Little can be changed due to the permanently fixed cupboards on one length of the wall so variation comes when Melissa swaps from one desk to the other. The cupboards are filled with units of curriculum, different kinds of papers and less needed resources for teaching and learning. The windows provide light, warmth from the sun shining through, and they can be opened for fresh air and a cool breeze. Like her washing hanging neatly and orderly in rows on the washing line, Kate prefers the schoolroom to be well organized with everything in its own place. For example, certain notes are positioned close-to-hand, paper clips can be found in the home tutor guides as placeholders for where Kate is up to each day, and a folder has been created with all of the feedback sheets and home tutor notes.

> *I always pack it away in the cupboard, the LAC and maths together so you are just pulling out the next lot of maths and LAC and all of the grammar and spelling that goes with that and the feedback sheets it's all together and it's easy to lay my hands on everything at once. So you can see the pile decreasing bit by bit in front of your eyes.* (Interview, October 12th, 2004)

Beginning experiences of distance education

Kate experienced her first year of Preschool and distance education with Emma as a gentle introduction full of play, theme kits and fun. Kate anticipated her involvement in her children's education would be hands-on and she is not surprised with just how much the role requires of her. For example, supervising, interpreting, explaining and cajoling. Although she was weary about the eleven years of home schooling she would be undertaking, Kate was eager to start what she saw as an adventure worth spending hours a day doing, "*…I just thought that I was going to make all the difference in her world* *and I was going to be the best teacher in the world and she would have the best education and we would spend so much time, I was really enthusiastic about it*" (Interview, August 30th, 2004). What surprised Kate was her impatience with her children not having instant understanding of curriculum concepts. She experienced frustration when they couldn't remember something she had told them. This experience confirmed for Kate that if she were to have an early childhood class of children, she would not cope at all.

Kate recalls several battles she had with Emma involving tears and feelings of sadness. She regrets she may have treated her tolerant child badly on occasion and is thankful Emma is a quick learner, "*I knew you'd have days when things didn't go right but I didn't think they'd be a sad as they were*" (Interview, August 2nd, 2004). Kate still has enthusiasm in her approach to teaching Melissa, although this is tempered knowing that there will be days that are challenging as well. Her patience is also not as stretched now her daughters are older even though,

> *Melissa still doesn't remember to use units of measurement, to start her sentences off with a capital letter and she is in Year 5. I've learnt that it doesn't matter how much I stomp or yell it is not going to make any difference. Probably just a matter of time.* (Interview, August 30th, 2004)

While Kate is more realistic about teaching and learning with Melissa, she still hopes that she is going to make a difference to her at the end of it all.

Kate began her first year as home tutor unknowing in many things about the program, only confident in her desperation to do the right thing for her child. The school's newsletter was full of strange terminology to Kate, yet provided her with information on such things as events and committee roles, without her having to be too involved at the outset. Attending a home tutor workshop, a minischool and a cluster for the first time was how Kate learned and continued her preparation for her role as home tutor. Kate brings her early learnings and experiences with her as she helps to plan school-related events and activities,

> *I remember going to my first cluster and feeling really awkward and not knowing. The other day at our cluster we invited next year's preschoolers to come along, or new preschoolers because some current parents will have preschoolers next year. So these two mums came along and I felt for them cause they felt the same way that I did at my very first cluster, cause they didn't know what was expected of you. But after that you know what to do and you feel very much a part of it all. First minischool, if you make an effort to go to the Year 1 minischool there are usually lots of other people who have never been before and so you don't feel like you stand out then cause there are a lot of other people learning minischool things. Just anything I do I feel like I do belong to the school community.* (Interview, October 12th, 2004)

Kate also found guidance and assistance in Emma's Preschool and Year 1 teacher. Although Kate was accompanied and helped by four or five other mothers/home tutors who all had girls in the same grade, Kate remembers that it was Emma's teacher she would phone on a regular basis.

In the nine years of home schooling Kate has acquired many other learnings, especially in experiencing the same curriculum twice with each of her daughters. She is less tied to the home tutor guide, less inclined to slavishly follow the directions for installing the curriculum. "*The first time I left something out I felt like a real sinner. I felt like I was cheating my child, and that teachers would frown on me*" (Interview, November 1st, 2004). While Kate is now more confident in deleting or adding curriculum activities, and personalising the educational experience, she refuses to miss an entire day's work. Kate is aware that the principal of the Gorman School of Distance Education encourages family's to do this when they attend cluster days and other school-organized events, however she is yet to know of any other home tutor who does. Kate and Melissa aim to send in 14 units of work, rather than the 15 the school requires and, by the end of the year Kate becomes less concerned that not every page of every assignment book is completed. This is due to the units of work focusing on revision [Revision weeks are set aside in the "Paper Return Calendar" each term in which formal curriculum units are not expected to be completed. It is common for families to use this time to catch up on school work or to plan revision activities using activities they did not utilise during previous curriculum units.]

More challenges have presented themselves also. With only Melissa to home educate, Kate is challenged by devoting the time everyday,

> *When you've got two there, there is just no way you could slack off. Now I've got one and she's in the upper classes and a lot more independent and she allows me and is independent enough that I can go off and leave her there for a little while or days at a time. When I have a meeting then I say to her 'You're going to have to do your work today and I'll mark it when I get home, and leave anything that you can't do'. So I guess it is more challenging devoting that time to Melissa. Putting it bluntly you could say that I'm getting sick of it! I can see the end and wish that it would come a bit quicker.* (Interview, August 30th, 2004)

Kate is grateful for her daughters as she believes it is Emma and Melissa that have been most helpful to her and she feels they are terrific.

A portrait of everyday life

John wakes early to begin his working day on the property and Kate usually rises after her husband at around 7 a.m. Kate is a member of several book clubs and always has a novel to take pleasure in while eating breakfast. Melissa wakes last and takes her dog for a run or walk and feeds her horse following breakfast. Morning notices begin the school day for Kate and Melissa. Kate brushes her teeth while listening and participating in the school community's messages of events, notification of on-air or telephone reading timetable changes, area meetings and announcement of encouragement award winners and birthdays. Melissa sometimes listens or participates in morning notices but generally prefers to wait for her mother in the lounge room reading a book or completing a puzzle or game.

Term 1 and Term 4 of the school year have similar school days. Kate likes to begin and end each school year with a particular routine. However, the school terms in-between are busy for Kate with her work and volunteer commitments. It is not common during Term 2 and Term 3 to complete one day's curriculum in a day, for example. Every second Monday requires Kate, as co-publisher, to edit the articles submitted for the local newspaper. The days in-between, Kate juggles other work and deadlines with her role as home tutor. During 2004, Kate has held an executive role on a school committee, fulfilled the role of a town councillor and has assisted with the organization of a conference. Kate became involved in the school committee through peer pressure and the support from other home tutors who were present in the meeting in which nominations were put forward. Other commitments, such as volunteering her time catering at a bull sale on a weekday, make keeping up with school work difficult. And now once a month Kate attends a town council meeting in her role as councillor on a Wednesday.

Extra work, an increase in phone calls and emails, and a general demand on Kate's time means that Kate ensures Melissa is on-track and has an idea of what is to be done next, by going to the schoolroom early in the day. While Kate is working in the office in the house, Melissa will come up and ask Kate to help her if she needs assistance. At smoko, Kate checks in with Melissa about the next session of activities before going back to work on the computer. If Kate is in town with other commitments, Kate will mark

Melissa's work late at night and use post-it-notes to comment as if she were there in the schoolroom. Comments like, "go back and look at this again" to bring something to her daughter's attention. Melissa will also write post-it-notes on workbook pages she is having difficulty completing. Comments like, "MUM!" or "HELP!" are part of their system they have developed to enable Melissa to work alone when her mother is not at home.

When morning notices have finished, Kate asks Melissa to unroll the linoleum onto the carpet in the lounge room to begin a highly-routined exercise program. As Melissa completes the exercises, Kate times her and reads a chapter book out loud. Mother and daughter laugh at the humorous parts together or make comments to one another about the events in the story.

Following the exercises, Melissa is asked to go downstairs to the schoolroom to begin writing in her journal or begin her spelling and grammar, activities she can do more independently. During this time, Kate finishes some chores around the house such as a load of laundry, or the dishes. Melissa is familiar with the school routine and work expectations. The routine is flexible – Kate has a general understanding of all that needs to be completed and is confident in changing the routine of the day set out in the curriculum. It is common for Kate to negotiate with Melissa what subject areas to do first and next. Melissa completes a large majority of the school work by herself during the middle months of the school year. The Carson home is a school space with a school routine and Kate struggles with others phoning, not realizing or respecting the fact she is teaching Melissa from 8 a.m. until the early afternoon each day.

> *I started off a few years ago putting the phone on the answering machine that I found I had so many phone calls to return at the end of the day that it wasn't funny and as I've become more involved in groups I prefer to take the calls as they come rather than just leave myself with a lot to do at the end of the day.* (Interview, August 30th, 2004)

When she is in the schoolroom with Melissa, Kate takes the time to discuss topics and to give Melissa positive feedback. They review completed work together. Kate can be heard saying such things as, "*I remember a time when that problem was difficult for you*" (Green, field notes, 2004). Kate frequently asks Melissa to talk about her thinking and problem-solving strategies. She rarely gives Melissa a direct answer. Rather Kate guides her in finding the answer through the questions she asks her daughter. If Melissa asks how to spell a word, Kate talks about the base word, if appropriate, and encourages Melissa to use the dictionary. While Melissa is working independently, Kate marks the activities she has completed, as well as working on her own tasks.

Smoko time, their morning break, usually occurs between 10 a.m. and 11 a.m. The school timetable means that lunch is at irregular times in the Carson household. Rarely does John join Kate and Melissa for meals during the day as he cannot fit into the irregularity of meals, or the long breaks between meals, in the school routine. "*So often we don't see a lot of each other through the day. Often if I am doing school then John's doing something out in the paddock, really living separate lives except when we come in together at night time*" (Interview, August 30th, 2004).

The afternoon sessions, following the 30-minute morning break, are usually spent finishing any activities in the first language arts session (LAC 1), and then Melissa completes mathematics and the second language arts session (LAC 2). All of these are accompanied by a lot of discussion. Kate especially enjoys having new topics or ideas introduced as they provoke new discussion about a variety of topics. Although time-consuming and demanding, Kate prefers this type of interaction with her daughter, rather than telling her to simply "Do your work."

Kate has kept many of the resources which were made with her eldest child so she does not have to spend the time cutting and preparing these again. Kate and Melissa have a good relationship. On occasion, Melissa responds to Kate's ideas or suggestions with frustration or defence. Melissa is aware of this and is grateful she is not at a regular school because she could not show her frustration toward a regular teacher like she does with her mother at home. Melissa becomes unhappy when Kate "bosses her around" because she would prefer to get on with her school work and get out and play.

Kate models concepts using other resources to scaffold learning and takes a step back when she knows Melissa can complete the task on her own. The learning in the schoolroom is carried out in a calm and non-hectic atmosphere. Melissa learns a lot from Kate especially in language as she feel she is not good at spelling and believes her mother is good at both writing and spelling. Kate helps with words or sentences Melissa doesn't understand. Because of her background in journalism, Kate was especially helpful to Melissa when she was asked to write a narrative and also complete part of a newspaper in her curriculum work. Spelling frustrates Melissa sometimes because simple words are difficult to figure out when she gets tired toward the end of the school day. Melissa appreciates that her mother understands what she is trying to write and knows she is not very good at handwriting because she likes to print, whereas in a regular school the teacher would not know her as well as her mother or would have to divide her attention to other children in the class. As a result of learning with her mother at home, Melissa feels she has come to know Kate better. For example, she knows her mother is not strong in mathematics as Kate is required to check answers in the mathematics book when taking the time to go over a problem with Melissa. She believes her mother would be more helpful and the school day would be better if she was in the schoolroom all the time rather than having to leave sometimes to work on other things.

When a curriculum unit of work is returned, Kate will go through it with Melissa in the afternoon. For example, Kate focuses on the comments, reading some and asking Melissa to read others. They read Melissa's journal and laugh about the spelling errors. Kate reviews the division as Melissa has experienced difficulty with the algorithm. They also read the feedback letter from the school of distance education teacher and Melissa enjoys collecting the stickers. Kate recognizes the great feedback the teacher has given and says that they will need to practice the skills the teacher has commented on and given ideas for improvement.

Melissa experiences days in the schoolroom that require long periods of endurance. Kate has her daughter complete all of the Australasian examinations in English, Science, Mathematics and, this year, the computer skills assessment. Kate feels the completion of these tests are preparation for learning how to complete an examination with an awareness and ability in how to manage the time allotted, focus on answering the easy questions and not stress over the hard questions. This feedback is not typically provided through the distance education curriculum or school-related events. Kate also benefits, as she is able to see which areas Melissa is able to complete with ease, and which areas she is struggling to understand on the different subjects' tests.

The best part of the school day for Melissa is when she has the opportunity to do art and computers on-air. She has enjoyed learning about and creating PowerPoint presentations, word documents, brochures and saving work to disks. Language is what she prefers over mathematics because art is occasionally integrated with language. Melissa believes she is good at art because she likes it and pays more attention to it.

Lunch is eaten whenever the school correspondence work is completed to Kate's satisfaction. Melissa has her Year 5 class' on-air lessons each afternoon except Mondays. Melissa has also joined the school's chess club, requiring her to have an extra on-air lesson one afternoon per week and to schedule in some chess homework. Melissa enjoys netball and swimming and Kate takes her to town for these activities on weekday afternoons.

Close to dinner time as the sun settles down onto the earth, Melissa does her chores, feeding the six working sheep dogs and hosing out their cages, and feeding the three guinea pigs with their crunchy dinner of carrots and celery. Following dinner, Kate works until 1 a.m. most evenings attending to other work commitments. The majority of Kate's day is spent interacting with different pieces of machinery or technology, and paper. Although Kate describes her work at home as being a lonely existence, her work does all indirectly involve communication with other people. Melissa may watch some television or spends time looking at peers' project work sent by the Year 5 teachers.

Weekends are occasionally spent doing school work to catch up. Kate continues to enjoy the football on a Sunday afternoon, but in front of her television after a morning of house cleaning.

Reflections on the home educating experience

In thinking about her home educating experiences, Kate feels fortunate that she has an academic background and believes her personality and her enjoyment of study and books assists her in teaching well. On a daily basis, Kate feels satisfaction when a different method or explanation she has used has worked after other approaches did not. Kate has learned to take deep breaths and to step back and reassess the teaching and learning moment. For Kate, teaching well means understanding that what works for one student won't necessarily work for another. She has also come to relax and not take everything so seriously. "*You've got to be able to go outside and laugh with your kids and play with them at the end of the day. It won't be the end of the world if they are struggling with something*" (Interview, August 30th, 2004).

Kate experiences a sense of community as a parent and as a home tutor first and foremost via the morning notices each morning and the subsequent email that is sent repeating the messages. Kate enjoys hearing the voices coming across the airways. In her executive role this year Kate has felt she is working for the whole school community and school-planned events such as graduation, the athletics carnival or the swimming carnival are important for her to attend because the majority of the school community gets together. Furthermore, Kate would not miss other opportunities to be a part of smaller communities such as minischool and cluster days. Kate's executive role in the school also positions her to work closely with the school principal.

Kate chooses to attend school-organized events for the social aspects, both for her and Melissa. Even though Melissa will be in Year 6 next year and is not required to attend clusters, Kate plans on going each term.

> *I think that it's great for the kids to have that time together with each other. I also think that it's really good for the parents, like I expect that our area representative will have a meeting tomorrow. I don't have anything specific to bring up for the P&C but I just want to hear what they are thinking about things, what they're saying about the athletics carnival and the small schools joining in, and how well the computer programs are working. It all feeds back into my role on school council. But I think that even if I didn't have P&C or school council stuff I'd still be, you still like talking to people about your school work and how everybody is coping.* (Interview, August 2nd, 2004)

Kate believes she has developed a good relationship with the teachers she is working with. From year to year, the quality of the relationship changes with each new year level teachers. For example, Kate is attentive to her compatibility with each teacher's personality, and the teacher's willingness to provide extra assistance. Kate has learned that the home-school relationship affects her teaching experience, particularly in being able to phone and get good advice from school of distance education staff that will make a difference. Email is also used by Kate frequently to contact teachers. A lot of Kate's work is done after hours, including school-related tasks, so rather than leaving telephone messages she sends an email. Kate finds support in individual teachers; for example, the following email correspondence (August 21, 2004) was with a school of distance education Year 5 teacher who does not have Melissa in her class:

> Hi Kate,
>
> I thought this may interest you. This website is to assist with the testing regime, but I found this article on spelling very interesting once I got past some of the vocab that I didn't understand! It may explain to some extent, what is needed to help children with spelling problems
> http://www.qsa.qld.edu.au/yrs1_10/testing_assessment/general/useSpell.pdf

Let me know what you think.
Regards [Year 5 teacher]

Kate finds the "home tutor notes" sent by each grade level extremely useful. The notes include deletions, hints on paying particular attention to certain exercises which children may have had difficulty understanding in the past, and highlights to ensure the children follow the instructions. With digitisation becoming more and more expected, the home tutor notes now also add in which activities are to be digitised, as well as which activities to delete because of on-air lessons planned from the curriculum papers.

Kate has been involved in organizing the home tutor workshop for next year as she believes in the importance of providing home tutors with support for teaching and learning at home. The theme of next year's workshop is "Back to Basics" in information technology and literacy and numeracy, after previous workshop focuses on stress management, classroom behaviour and first aid. Suggestions have begun to come in for possible sessions, with no one wanting to spend a lot of money on the entire event. Teachers and staff will be asked to workshop as home tutors view them as experts in their field who they can utilise.

Technology is an important aspect both for communication and learning in Kate and Melissa's school day and for Kate's other work commitments and communication with others. Kate speaks positively about her experiences with the computer; however, there have been obstacles as the year has progressed,

> *I'm networking my home computer which has the email with the school computer and the networking hasn't worked all year. I keep on thinking that when we are going to do Internet lessons that I will get that all fixed up. It's easy having just one child to put all the school addresses on the home computer and Melissa just accesses it from there. We did have an Internet lesson last term on the Olympics and we had to research things on Olympics and of course my networking wasn't*

> *going. Luckily there is only about 7 or 8 meters between the radio and the computer so Melissa was sitting at the home computer and every time [Melissa's teacher] called her back in she would rush back down to the radio. When your email goes down for some reason and you want to circulate the notes from a meeting that's frustrating. I had a gecko die in the school computer once and shorted everything out so we couldn't use it. Luckily we had the home computer to turn to so that wasn't too bad and [school technician] was there to fix everything.* (Interview, October 12th, 2004)

There have been milestones which have been rewarding for Kate, especially when her children were recognized with good marks, received an encouragement award or were chosen to be on a sporting, academic or extra-curricular team.

> *It was very exciting for us when Emma received the Citizenship Award in Year 5 and got picked for the TOM teams in Year 6 and 7. Those sorts of things. I suppose they're more milestones for your child but you feel you've been able to have some sort of contribution in getting them there.*
> (Interview, August 30th, 2004)

Although Kate finds many satisfactions in teaching Melissa, she is aware of how demanding distance education is on her time and how consuming it is of her mind. Returning to the schoolroom after holidays and the VISE tutor's stay, Kate reflects,

> *...having nine weeks of not concentrating on it, I had forgotten a few of the simple things to do and I had to remind myself of what I was doing. I think that you need to be in that teaching mode everyday and it really consumes your time and brain and thinking, everything.* (Interview, August 30th, 2004)

While Kate talks of the change into a teaching mode in the schoolroom, she sees herself as a role model, somebody that her children can learn from. Kate hopes she is somebody who can guide them in learning not only in school but also about life. Melissa understands that the principal, parents and other teachers in the school community all make a difference in her learning. She believes they want her education to be good so they make it the best they can.

Sharing views on education, goals and hopes

Kate believes learning is how you make something of your life.

> *I think that I will be learning something until the day that I die. I'm learning something while I'm teaching my kids. Last week I learnt that marshmallow was made from beef products. I'm learning about people's personalities and learning about behavioural techniques. Everyday I am learning and I love learning because I think that it makes you a more rounded person to learn new things all the time. I'm a person who loves learning, don't know about loves teaching*! (Interview, August 30th, 2004)

She also believes her children's education provides the skills associated with discipline and time management and the knowledge they can use in their later life. In thinking about the future, Kate hopes Emma and Melissa find a path that is satisfying to them. Kate also hopes her daughters will make the most of their abilities and not fall short of what they know they could accomplish. Kate is attentive to her role in guiding Emma and Melissa's decisions rather than pushing them in a direction which is her agenda and not things that they want to do.

> *It was very interesting in these last holidays; Emma brought home from St Peters the Year 9 and 10 course outlines and she had to start making choices for Years 9 and 10…It was very hard for me just to say "What are you interested in?" rather than saying "I would love to see you do this" I did say that "You are good at this and your report shows that you like doing such and such" to try and help her out. She is a very indecisive person. If it was me, I think that a second language is a great thing to have. I studied German for five years and I don't use it in my life anymore. As a journalist I think that it has helped me work out sentence structures and why words are spelt certain ways…But if Emma doesn't want to learn another language there is no point in trying to make her do it just for my satisfaction.* (Interview, August 30th, 2004)

Kate talks of her role as one of parenting, not teaching. She strives to demonstrate faith in her children, and have the strength to allow them to develop their own independence.

Kate encounters difficulty in doing this, especially as she sees Emma and Melissa starting to become little adults.

CHAPTER 7

THE MITCHELL FAMILY

Cherie, her husband, Jeremy, and their four sons—Nathan 9, Adrian 6, Kyle 5 and Paul 3—live on a sheep and cattle property in Western Queensland.

About Cherie

Although Jeremy has lived his entire life in the same house the Mitchell's now reside in, Cherie is geographically removed from where she grew up with her parents, sister and two brothers on a property in New South Wales. It is difficult for Cherie and Jeremy to travel with the four boys and to also organize the care of the property while they are absent. Cherie has fond memories of her time with her family, and feels some sadness that her parents do not visit more often, especially as her own children are growing.

The age difference between Cherie and her sister and the following two siblings meant that for many years Cherie's mother and father were able to give their daughters undivided attention. Cherie's father worked on the property for a large company with ten other men. Children from other families working on the property were away at boarding school and, being the only children around at the time, Cherie remembers being well cared for by the small community. Cherie also recalls camping and fishing with her entire family in the area where she lived, but many of her memories are based on spending her time with her father in the outdoors, while her sister enjoyed her mother's company inside the house doing chores and activities.

> *Because there were only two of us, there was never much competition. I spent a lot of time with dad and he showed me a lot of things and probably that one-on-one parent thing too. Dad would get us motorbikes; he was a mechanic so built us motorbikes and go-carts. He just loved tinkering away with things. He made us a go-cart with a little trailer so that [my sister] could drive and tow me around. But [my sister] was more indoors so she was with mum and she learnt to cook and everything before me and I learnt to drive before she did. There was a bit of conflict there growing up because she would say that dad favoured me and I'd say that mum favoured her more. But she just wasn't interested in being outside and still isn't. She just had an office job and that was all that she was going to do.* (Interview, August 10th, 2004)

Cherie's mother would worry about how much mess the girls would make, and her father would be concerned with how well the girls carried out their responsibilities. Cherie's father not only taught her to drive but gave her other responsibilities involving outside work on the property.

While her sister chose to work in an office, Cherie left high school during her final year to become a jillaroo [a woman who is learning to work on a sheep or cattle station]. After graduating from a small primary and junior high setting to a larger high school for Years 11 and 12, Cherie found it difficult to become socially accepted and did not enjoy her schooling experience as much as she had previously. Much of her enjoyment had been with her friends in her primary school. The primary school had an enrolment of around 30 students and Cherie had the same three friends in her class throughout her entire primary school experience.

Being in a small community, Cherie and her peers would all catch the same bus and travel the 30-45 minutes together each day to school. Two teachers shared the teaching and a teaching assistant also came to Cherie's classes. The large classroom space was divided by a partition, Years 1 through 3 on one side and 4 through 6 on the other. Like any traditional classroom, the blackboard covered one entire wall and was the centre of the classroom. The children were grouped in arrangements of three or five according to their Year level. Learning to write involved long periods of copying from the blackboard, therefore Cherie and her peers all faced toward it at their old wooden desks.

On adjacent sides of the blackboard, there were louvers, leaving little room for charts and posters. Cherie specifically remembers a large number board, similar to a hundreds board, always up on the wall, and a small space in the corner of the classroom surrounded by hessian material. While the teacher was working with other children, Cherie and her peers enjoyed the space for reading and games if they had finished their work early.

Cherie believes all her teachers generally did their job well with the students who were there to learn. She brings to mind being especially fond of two teachers; one, a male teacher in Year 3 and the second a female high school teacher. Cherie recalls they both had caring personalities and showed no favouritism toward any particular student. Cherie says of her high school teacher,

> *Probably the one I really remember was Miss W. and she was in Year 8 and she had us for History, French and English. She was just a really good teacher, she didn't favour anyone, she explained it, if she knew that you were having trouble she'd pick you out and make sure that you got it. She was also an interesting teacher, she was a bit different but she was interesting and she got her points across. Everyone was really good. She wasn't mean or anything, but no one mucked up in her class so I gather she must have been mean at some stage to get the reputation. No one mucked up in her class and you sat there and done what you were told. She was also a teacher that you could talk to on playground duty. She'd come up and talk to you and something like that.*
> (Interview, August 10th, 2004)

By describing her teacher as different, Cherie refers to the way her teacher dressed in an old-fashioned way. Nevertheless, Cherie also appreciated her teacher's efforts in assisting individual students to be socially accepted.

Cherie also has a vivid memory of a teacher who used verbal and physical discipline. Although this teacher left the school prior to Cherie moving to his class, she remembers his yelling and an event which saw him pushing a student down a flight of stairs. Cherie remembers her peers being afraid of him and some parents disliking this teacher. She attributes the teacher's behaviour and response to students to his temper and wonders if he continued to be a teacher.

Cherie did not question her teachers' authority and believes the students did not have any rights. Punishment in school was the cane or a note which was sent home to students' parents. Cherie was kept behind after school one day which meant missing the bus and her parents having to drive to town to pick her up. Not only did she receive a lecture from the teacher, but also a scolding from her parents when she closed the door of the car.

The students in Cherie's schools did not have rights, as she recalls, however the students did have responsibilities in the form of jobs around the school.

> *They were always stricter back then and you just knew that you didn't muck up cause they would jump on you. The older kids always put up the flags in the mornings, they had specific jobs. One would ring the bell, they would pick one child to ring the bell for that term, so he'd have to ring the bell when little lunch was over. When it was Year 6 we had to go in 5 minutes early from little lunch and you'd put the jug on for the teachers, make their smoko and the tea lady would probably call us and there were two of us who would get up and go boil the kettle and everything. But you had specific little jobs.*
> (Interview, August 10th, 2004)

Having a job was a responsibility Cherie had in high school also.

Cherie came to the area she now lives to begin her third property job since leaving high school. It was at this time she met Jeremy and has lived there ever since. Cherie and Jeremy made a choice to live on their property because of the lifestyle it afforded their children. With that decision came the choice to enrol in distance education or to enrol their children at the primary school in town.

> *[It] is a good town, but we also thought that it defeats the purpose of being married if we moved to town then Jeremy couldn't come. We had thought of moving away but you have your good and bad days but we really like this lifestyle for our kids. And now I've learnt to let other things go, not as particular in the house as I was before. With school and doing school now you think that it's your kids education that you're mucking around with so it comes first. We just always knew that we were going to do it. Moving just wasn't an option at the time and I don't think that it is cause I like the lifestyle for the kids.*
> (Interview, August 10th, 2004)

About Nathan and Adrian

Nathan and Adrian each spent two years in Preschool as they were born in December, three years apart, and Cherie felt they would have struggled with the formal and structured curriculum a year earlier. Both boys have their own individual interests and abilities. Both boys complete their school work each day but at different rates and with varied concentration. Nathan is a quiet achiever who causes adults to question if he is learning. On the other hand, Adrian asks a lot of questions both in school learning and general conversation about how and why things work or how and why things are the way they are. However, when asked to share his understanding and knowledge, Adrian is hesitant and sometimes unwilling. Adrian prefers to complete the bare necessities of the tasks required of him. He also does not find enjoyment in writing and will write very short, non-descriptive sentences and stories, even though he has orally shared lengthy and interesting sentences and stories.

Nathan is aware of the time and attention his mother is required to share between him and his siblings in the schoolroom. He worries about school every now and then because of the challenges he faces in school, but he is happy that reading is an aspect of his school work he is good at and comfortable with. Nathan finds school computer work difficult but enjoys the small selection of computer games the family owns and could spend longer playing the games by himself if he were permitted. This year has seen Nathan noticeably mature and become more willing to socialize with his peers by participating with them in games and other activities. He stayed at minischool for the first time by himself whereas in previous years he would not have even considered it. At home, Nathan has begun sharing his opinions and points of view in conversations with his parents, something they first interpreted as a cheeky behaviour in their son. Nathan enjoys playing sports with his brothers, riding his bicycle, climbing trees and swimming in the bore water close to the house. Nathan talks about living on the property as one of the best things in his life. Nathan's cousin, who is 13 and is now at boarding school, is his hero. Like his older cousin, he is interested in animals, especially birds, as he finds some so pretty. He likes learning about fascinating animals – wild, funny, all different kinds! – and would like to know more about ocean creatures.

Nathan's younger brother, Adrian, has always been outgoing and will talk to strangers if he is interested in asking what they were doing. Adrian has confidence in his writing and colouring-in abilities and says that the best part of the school day is drawing pictures. Adrian expresses his enjoyment of having his mother as a teacher in the schoolroom as they work together on various activities. Adrian believes his mum is really good at reading and has been helpful for him with handwriting. Some things in the schoolroom he would change would be the inclusion of more "fun" stuff such as playing with his brothers. Finishing at smoko would also make the school day better for Adrian so he has more time to play football with his family (something he recalls as the best thing he does with his mother).

Outside of the schoolroom, Adrian is particularly determined in mastering tasks more so than any of his three brothers. He prefers to be outside and rides his motorbike everyday around the house area, jumps over things and tests the speed of the machine. Although Cherie and Jeremy are particular about their children's manners and family routines, the boys are given many opportunities which suggest their parents view them as competent and able to participate appropriately. Nathan likes to drive the family's four-wheel drive. Staying in second gear he drives up to 60 kilometres an hour, steers perfectly when not showing his passengers a point of interest, and ensures everyone accompanying him is safe. He has also driven the tractor to the bore and back, surprising his parents and brothers. Nathan would like to be really good at flying a helicopter and hopes one day to have the chance to spend some time with a neighbour who is working at a gold mine as he would like to learn how to drive a mining truck and how to put the safety gear on. Finding gold would be an extra bonus!

About Kyle and Paul

Kyle is a curious human being, and like Adrian, constantly asks questions and shares stories and experiences. He demonstrates stubbornness when asked to do something he does not want to do or in claiming what he says and believes is right. Kyle spends time by himself exploring and playing and often surprises his parents with what he knows. He especially enjoys playing in the playroom with the toy farm animals and has a terrific memory for remembering where animals and other play resources are and what he was role playing on previous occasions. Kyle is learning which hand he prefers for writing, drawing and playing sports and completes a lot of visual representations backwards. Kyle was the first son of Cherie and Jeremy who said he was going to live on the property (and borrow his father's big red truck to use!).

Paul has an easy temperament like his three older siblings. He observes his brothers intently and learns from them quickly, copying their words and actions. His attentiveness is also apparent when he watches television, specifically during animal documentaries. Although Nathan, Adrian and Kyle all have their special time with Paul, he spends the majority of time playing with Kyle while Nathan and Adrian are in the schoolroom.

All four children have a fun loving relationship with Cherie and Jeremy and enjoy sharing their adventures. Cherie remembers some of these retellings,

> *How many roos dad has shot, when they go spotlighting. They are pretty good, they tell us about most things. Whether they have seen a baby lamb, when they are lambing, who was the first one to see the lamb. Probably when they have done something or made something over in the shed with Jeremy. About a month ago they all made their own guns they were pretty excited to come and show them off. They might pick a big orange off the tree, they'll come over and say 'Hold out your hand mum and close your eyes and I'll give you something.' Actually they show us most things, from anywhere. Getting really excited and seeing a baby lamb, shot a snake, seen a baby calf, gone spotlighting and got a cat, but then it is pretty hard cause you have got to divide it up so that each child can tell a little bit of the story. Especially when they have gone with Jeremy and I've stayed home. Paul came and told me that they shot a cat and Kyle had to say what colour it was and Adrian had to say where it was and Nathan told how many shots had hit it. It was all broken up. Every now and then one child will come and blurt the whole lot out.* (Interview, October 4th, 2004)

It is important to Cherie and Jeremy that their children feel comfortable in talking with them about their whole experience – the successes and challenges. Although the children are particularly keen to share stories with Cherie when she has not been involved in an activity they have done with Jeremy, the children are less inclined to share their experiences of their time in the schoolroom. Jeremy's brother and sister-in-law live close by and the children like going to their Uncle and Aunt's place. The boys' Uncle and Aunt have similar interests to Cherie and Jeremy and spend time doing various activities with two of the boys at a time. Cherie hopes that these relations will encourage her children to have other adults to talk to if they feel that they cannot approach their parents.

The schoolroom

The Mitchell schoolroom is an air-conditioned modular home equipped with three separate areas. One area has a bathroom with a toilet, basin and shower. Another area is arranged with desks, equipment and resources for completing regular school work. A third area is used for on-air lessons, telephone reading and art. There is also a tape recorder in this space for the boys to listen to tapes. Cherie positions herself at a desk in a chair in-between Nathan and Adrian. They are both beside Cherie and she rolls her chair closer to each as she works individually with them. Although there are numerous teaching and learning resources and stationary supplies there seems to be a place for everything on the desks, upon shelves, in cupboards and filed in cabinets. The walls and cupboard doors are filled with instructional posters and charts: three alphabet charts, cursive, print and a joins train, number facts I know, solar system, THRASS charts, blends and ends are fun, ordinal numbers, times tables, multiplication and division, yearly calendar, state maps of Australia, paper return guides, the world of colours, nouns, pronouns, map of world, children-made mobiles hanging from the ceiling, alphabet chart, word ladder, verbs, nouns, describing words, on-air timetable, insects and spiders, and a vowel house.

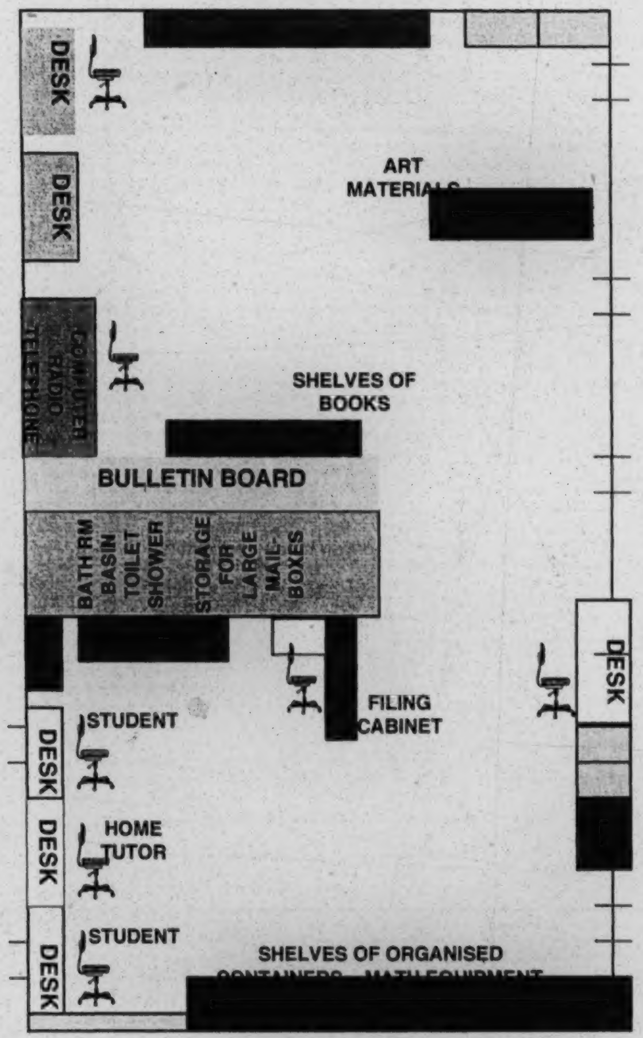

DESK
DESK
ART
MATERIALS
COMPUTER
RADIO
TELEPHONE
SHELVES OF
BOOKS
BULLETIN BOARD
BATH RM
BASIN
TOILET
SHOWER
STORAGE
FOR
LARGE
MAIL-
BOXES
DESK
FILING
CABINET
STUDENT
DESK
HOME
TUTOR
DESK
STUDENT
DESK
SHELVES OF ORGANISED
CONTAINERS - MATH EQUIPMENT

Figure 5. The Mitchell's schoolroom

There are also many examples of the children's writing and artwork and their sticker charts, awards and certificates. When setting up the schoolroom, Cherie was inspired by Kyle's Preschool he attends once per week in town.

> *When you walk in they have got lots of bright things on the wall, lots of learning things for them to see. And fun things for them to see and that's what I've tried to create in our schoolroom. With visual things to see.*
> (Interview, November 9th, 2004)

Cherie displays her children's school work as a way for them to feel pride in their work, and a willingness to put in a greater effort as they know their work will be displayed if they do for all the family to see. According to Cherie, the other posters and charts are stimulating, bright and happy, rather than having dull, blank walls.

> *I like the walls to be covered in something instead of just the plain wall. But I do find that they do refer to the charts that are on there. Once they've learnt that they are there they refer to them. You'll see Adrian look around for a number or look for something on the THRASS chart, so they are helpful. We've had him in the house doing journal and he'll say 'It's in the car box' and he'll turn around and it's not there in the house. So they do use it.* (Interview, November 9th, 2004)

The schoolroom was originally set up on the back of the house for convenience when Cherie and Jeremy were extending their family. Being close to the house, Cherie could easily feed the younger siblings and change their nappies throughout the school day. Although the location of the schoolroom on the veranda was convenient for both Cherie's mother and home tutor role, it also caused an overlapping of roles/duties because of its location. She finds the purchase of the donger more suitable as it is located separately from the house and her full attention is on working with her children, rather than doing household chores as they complete an activity. Furthermore, when Cherie, Adrian, Nathan, Kyle and Paul leave the schoolroom, they do not return; whereas when they worked on the veranda Cherie would find herself asking the boys to continue some activities in the afternoons.

> *You're never really finished. But now once we leave and shut that door, school is over for the day. The kids don't have to go back. And now the little ones are bigger, they're not so demanding. I think it works well now out of the house.*
> (Interview, August 10th, 2004)

Beginning experiences of distance education

In preparation for her role as home tutor, Cherie talked with other families who have experienced distance education. She also had the opportunity to visit her neighbours and gained some ideas for the layout of the schoolroom. Cherie also had plans of what she would be like as her children's teacher but she found it was not as she thought it was going to be.

> *I always remember saying that I wouldn't yell and I'd be a really good teacher, we'd have such a perfect routine, which is all just blown out the window and yes I do yell and nearly throttle my children some days. You just think your going to your first teaching job and you're going to do all these things and then you get in there and reality hits and this is just not what it's going to be.*
> (Interview, August 10th, 2004)

Cherie's early experiences with Nathan were challenging but novel, therefore something new and exciting. In Nathan's first year of Preschool, Cherie "stressed over" completing both the teaching and learning tasks in the schoolroom and her household chores. Cherie finds herself less "uptight" than she was in the beginning because three children presently keep her extremely busy and concentrated in the schoolroom with the little situations on a daily basis not bothering her as much as they once did.

Cherie felt more comfortable in the Preschool year as she enjoys art and craft activities. When Year 1 approached, however, Cherie began to have more concerns and doubts, including the greatest stress of wondering how to teach a child to read. Cherie is grateful she began her home tutor role in Preschool as she has learned with her children along the way and would find it difficult beginning teaching her children if they were in higher year levels. The home tutor resources provided Cherie with most of the guidance and she ensured she never lost any of them!

Although the number of children in the schoolroom has increased, Cherie has become more familiar with the curriculum requirements, school expectations and teaching Adrian then Kyle has become easier. Cherie is increasingly comfortable with what is coming next and what activities to omit.

> *You've go to be careful with some of the art activities because you think, "We've done that and it was boring" but Adrian might find it really interesting. So you can't just skip it and I think that by the time Paul comes through I'm going to hate the Year 1 papers. I'm going to be bored with it but it's all new to him so you've got to do it with him.* (Interview, September 13th, 2004)

A portrait of everyday life

Cherie begins her day at 5.30 a.m. by going for a walk along a consistent route. She enjoys the early morning exercise by herself, the time to clear her mind and prepare herself for the day ahead. Upon her return at 6 a.m., Jeremy has her cup of tea ready and they sit down and have breakfast together before the children wake up.

The household chores begin after breakfast with Cherie sweeping the floors and hanging the laundry she put on to wash before leaving for her walk. The boys begin to wake, staggering into the kitchen. It varies from day to day who is awake first, but very rarely are all four children calling out to their mother for their bowls of cereal at the same time. Cherie stays close to the house waiting for Nathan, Adrian, Kyle and Paul so she can serve them before they go outside to play or to help their father with the chores or property work. The mornings can be hectic in the Mitchell household, especially during the weekdays as Cherie aims to complete many of her indoor chores prior to the school day beginning. Once all children have had breakfast, Cherie makes their beds and joins the family outside for their game of soccer or tennis at around 7.30 a.m. Soccer is played in the cooler months and, when the summer temperatures rise, the family plays tennis. Adrian has begun tennis lessons in town and Jeremy also plays outside with all the boys some afternoons, practicing and providing them with instructions in tennis and positive feedback. Cherie finds the family games energize the children's minds and bodies prior to going over to the schoolroom. The games become competitive with Jeremy and Cherie on different teams and enjoying trying to outdo each other. The boys laugh along with the competitiveness and keep score.

At 8 a.m., Cherie, Adrian and Nathan race over to the schoolroom for morning notices. Sometimes Kyle, who is enrolled in Preschool, and Paul will join them in the schoolroom at that time also. In the third term of the school year, Cherie is planning more structured activities for Kyle when she has time to spend one-on-one with him, such as learning to write and recognize numerals, letters and core words. Both Kyle and Paul enjoy reading and art and are familiar with where to find such supplies as paper, scissors, glue and paint at their desks.

It is a multi-age school learning space, however, Nathan, Adrian and Kyle all work with different curricula (Year 4, Year 1 and Preschool) and require different levels of home tutor support. Cherie divides her time and attention between Nathan and Adrian or between all four of her children when Kyle and Paul are there in the mornings. However, the majority of the time is focused on Adrian.

Nathan and Adrian are familiar with the school routine, which subjects or activities they should be working on and where the resources are. All four children have a grid chart to fill with stickers either from their school of distance education teacher or Cherie. Throughout the day, Cherie makes reference to the chart to change Adrian's behaviour. Generally, she will inform Nathan if he has worked well enough for a sticker at the end of the day. Five dollars or three pieces of bubblegum are examples of the rewards Cherie offers for a full chart.

Following morning notices, Cherie orally recites Nathan's spelling for him to write. He is reliant on Cherie, as part of the routine, to put the spelling word in a sentence. On her other side, Adrian is asked to spell core, number or family words. Adrian is not always happy about the words he is given to spell because he doesn't know them! Cherie supports him in experiencing success with words he is attempting to spell for the first time but is more demanding of words he has already practiced. As Nathan concludes writing the spelling words he wrote incorrectly three times and orally spelling the words to Cherie, his school of distance education teacher phones at 8.30 a.m. for telephone reading. The telephone reading books are in piles near the telephone and the boys know that the first one on the pile is his book to read for that day. Once per week, Kyle has on-air at 9.00 a.m. so Nathan is quick to move from the telephone so Kyle can reach and hear the radio. Jeremy joins Kyle and assists him for that lesson whenever he is able. At 9.30 a.m. Adrian rushes to the radio to join his lesson. Cherie joins him during on-air, keeping him on-task by repeating instructions or questions from the distance education teacher. The radio reception is of poor quality between the peers in Adrian's class and many times his teacher misses his call-in. Every second week Cherie joins a home tutor session in lieu of Nathan and Adrian's on-air lesson.

Cherie prefers to observe Adrian while he is completing an activity and makes suggestions or instructs correction as he is working, rather than simply reviewing the completed activity. Cherie is especially attentive to the neatness of both of the boys' handwriting and the formation of each letter as Nathan is learning cursive writing and Adrian is learning the beginner's alphabet. Cherie will erase the boys work to rewrite and model the formation of letters. The papers often instruct Nathan to discuss various activities with his home tutor but he has a tendency to go ahead and do this without conversing with Cherie. Nathan is becoming increasingly independent, yet Cherie insists (for her own piece of mind) that he does not continue from one activity to the next on his own before he converses with her about what he has completed and what he understands the next activity is asking of him. Cherie tends to initiate a discussion with Nathan if there is something he doesn't understand or complete correctly and assists her son by showing him different strategies or relating the topic to their own family experiences. When waiting for Cherie to review his work, or when waiting for Adrian to complete his school assignments, Nathan chooses a book from the selection beside his desk. Adrian is less patient and independent in finding something to do while he is waiting and can often be heard calling, "*Mum, I'm waiting for you*!" or "*Next*!" (Green, field notes 2004). At 10.00 a.m. Cherie and the children join Jeremy for their morning break for 30 minutes. After preparing a quick snack and drink, they also try and fit in a game together such as skipping or "rob the nest." Cherie claims that whether they have a game depends on whether "*it has been a 'good' day or a 'bad' morning in the schoolroom*" (Interview, August 10th, 2004).

Adrian's radio lesson begins at 10.30 a.m. and once a week this includes a longer one-hour computer lesson. A few activities throughout each unit of work are completed on the computer. The digitised lesson is then sent to his teacher. When Nathan is on-air, Adrian will sit with Cherie as she listens to Nathan while helping Adrian at the same time. Nathan requires some assistance on-air as he sometimes will not respond to a question, becomes side tracked and begins scribbling or playing with objects close-to-hand. However, Cherie tries to use this time to spend 30 minutes one-on-one with Adrian. As Cherie explains it, it is their, "*…time of buckling and getting things done, or if he is having trouble then we can concentrate with him in that area*" (Interview, November 9th, 2004).

Following Nathan's on-air, Adrian hears the telephone ring when his teacher is calling for telephone reading. Nathan begins mathematics and Adrian begins the same subject following his telephone reading. Nathan and Adrian are more responsive to this session's activities, which Cherie claims is due to them knowing the school day is almost complete. Games and other less-structured activities in the mathematics curriculum provide the opportunity for both boys to participate in a learning activity together on occasion. Other occasions have provided the opportunity for Nathan and Adrian to work together. For example, they created a fossil together when the Year 1 and Year 4 curriculum corresponded with a topic on dinosaurs. Cherie also encourages the boys to listen to each other's reading of their own published stories. It is more common in revision weeks for Cherie to plan similar activities with different degree of difficulties.

Cherie finds that the three-year age difference between Nathan and Adrian presents obstacles in the schoolroom and has changed the dynamic between the four siblings during their everyday lives. While Adrian, Kyle and Paul continue to play similar games, Nathan has matured and prefers his own space. Cherie plans for Kyle and Adrian to work on activities or games together because Adrian is closer in age to Kyle than Nathan. Cherie also sees Nathan as being more advanced in school-related work.

At times when Cherie is experiencing difficulty explaining a concept and/or when the boys are experiencing difficulty grasping a concept, she will direct them to find Jeremy to explain it a different way. The place for school learning is extended to wherever the children's father is and they also see that he values their learning. Cherie will also send the boys to their father, Jeremy, to have him demonstrate the practicality of a skill or concept and have them manipulate the objects for their own understanding. For example, the curriculum talked about a spirit level and "*that was good because Jeremy's got the big spirit level over in the shed and I just said 'You've half an hour tomorrow and I'll just send the kids over' and he just showed them how he uses it in the shed, day to day things and I think that's more practical than just showing it in the papers, showing how he uses it*" (Interview, September 13th, 2004). In addition, Cherie will ask Jeremy to cover concepts, such as core words and counting in fives, while driving around in the paddock with the children as she believes they don't realize that they are participating in school-related work as it is not with Cherie.

Between morning break and the end of the school day, Nathan and Adrian both complete LAC1, Mathematics and LAC2. For introducing a new concept or topic, Cherie follows the suggestions outlined in the home tutor notes. The school day usually ends between 1.00 p.m. - 1.30 p.m. with Cherie doing some revision or recall with the boys through games if they finish earlier (Kyle and Paul join in also if they are in the schoolroom at the time). Cherie prefers Nathan and Adrian to stay until each has completed the work before running outside to play or over to the shed where Jeremy is working. Adrian completes his school day reading levelled books with Cherie while Nathan predominantly reads his alone. It is Adrian who is generally finished his school work first and Cherie has a variety of additional quick activities she does with him. These may include, for example, changing the first letter of a sight word, number or family word to create a new word.

Journal writing is often left until after school and the boys have the choice to write their entry anytime between the end of the school day and bath time. Cherie usually sits with Adrian observing him closely, giving instructions to use spacing and to keep the letters of words close together. She also encourages her son to use his THRASS chart or dictionary to spell unfamiliar words he circles in his first attempt. Adrian is also persuaded to write two sentences and to include describing words. Most days, Cherie stays in the schoolroom for thirty minutes writing feedback to the school of distance education teachers, preparing for tomorrow's lessons or tidying up and cleaning the schoolroom. Cherie likes the structure of the school day as it ensures everything can be completed.

> *It's a pretty well structured day. When you look at it you can see that you do all of that in a day. Because I'm conscious of the school and I want them to learn, not succeed [not just get it done] and go ahead we probably spend most of the time there.* (Interview, November 9th, 2004)

An outside observer would find it impossible to record all that is seen in the course of a school day. Cherie is constantly guiding, assisting, instructing, checking and conversing. For the Mitchell family, routines, organized spaces and resources, support and patience all assist in alleviating the busy-ness and levels of feeling overwhelmed that accompany four children in the schoolroom.

Nathan believes his mother is a good teacher and is proud to do his school work with her. In comparison to VISE tutors, he prefers Cherie because VISE tutors do things differently to what he is used to and expect too much work to be completed. Nathan enjoys language arts with his mother as she is "*good at it*" and mathematics with his father because he is "*good at it*" (Interview, August 9th, 2004). Nathan and Adrian understand that in a regular school they wouldn't finish as early as they do at home. A regular teacher would also not be as organized as their mother. Nathan finds his mother helpful but would prefer not to have any of his brothers in the schoolroom, especially Adrian who needs Cherie to help him. Although he is aware of the assistance his parents provide him, Nathan sees the principal of the Gorman School of Distance Education as making the biggest difference in his school learning because "*he is the owner and looks after everyone*" (Interview, August 9th, 2004).

The family enjoy lunch together soon after Cherie comes over to the house and then the family spends the afternoon outside if the weather is not too hot. Cherie likes to spend time in the garden and if Paul has a sleep she will prepare dinner in the afternoon so at 6 p.m. she can turn the vegetables on and by 7 p.m. the family can have their dinner. Cherie spends a lot of time in the kitchen preparing meals and she is often accompanied by Jeremy or her children helping with the preparation.

If Jeremy is doing cattle work or other jobs close to the house, the family will help. Otherwise, the children have the afternoon free to play, help their dad with something in the shed or ride their motorbikes. Cherie tells, "*They're pretty well outside kids, I think because we're outside. I don't like being cooped up in the house*" (Interview, August 10th, 2004). While saying this, Adrian, Kyle and Paul do enjoy playing in the playroom with the multitude of toy animals and farm machinery. It is the children's room to create and explore and is tidied up when Cherie feels the mess has become too much. Cherie and Jeremy can unobtrusively sit at the dining room table observing the boys and listening to them create play scenarios.

Prior to dinner, the children have their baths. Bath time does not always go smoothly in the Mitchell household with the boys not wanting to be the first in the bath. Following dinner, the family may watch some television together, or play a board or card game, or the children play in their bedrooms. Between 8.00 p.m. and 8.30 p.m. Cherie and Jeremy prepare the boys for bed and read each of their children a story.

A long 15-hour day closes and Cherie and Jeremy have their nightly ritual of a cup of tea and converse about the day passed and the day approaching.

> *That's the end of the day and you sit down and breathe a sigh of relief that it's just us, 'It's over'. We seem to like that cup of tea after they've gone to bed. It gives us our time, just talk about what we've got to do tomorrow. If there were any problems during the day, 'What are we going to do with our children?' Part of the parcel I think.* (Interview, August 10th, 2004)

Some time over weekends or holidays is spent catching up on any school-related work or revising concepts, especially when school-organized events are approaching. Cherie makes use of "day 10"--a day in the curriculum with nothing planned so home tutors and students can revise work or complete activities or whole days missed for a variety of reasons. For example, because Nathan's workload is heavy, Cherie may use weeknights to complete the unit. Sometimes it is necessary to also spend a Saturday with Nathan and a Sunday with Adrian. This way they have some special time together that Cherie supplements with a treat of a candy. Longer holidays do not mean no school work for Nathan and Adrian. They continue with their spelling and reading and Nathan continues to learn his number facts. The Mitchell's weekends, however, predominantly emphasise family time,

> *Working outside together or just poking around. Sundays we like to do something in the garden together whether it's just fertilizing, pulling out weeds. We like our garden so we spend a bit of time. I think it's what I like that keeps me sane. That's why some [plants] are trimmed really nicely. If it's a bad day I'll trim all these leaves off. 'Come out and see how the bougainvillea looks, they've been pruned so it must have been a bad day.* (Interview, August 10th, 2004)

Jeremy's family are also close by and tennis or barbeque events, for example, are planned for an extended family get-together that Cherie, Jeremy and the boys will attend.

Reflections on the home educating experience

Cherie feels that her children make her teaching role easier and more enjoyable. She sees herself not as a perfected teacher, but someone who is learning as she teaches her children. Cherie perceives her four boys as well-behaved and as coming to the schoolroom willingly each day. In turn, Cherie endeavours to enter the schoolroom with a cheerful disposition and rewards her children for their hard work and efforts. Cherie feels this is one of her greatest challenges - walking over to the schoolroom with a positive attitude - otherwise the children are affected. "*You just go over there and do it, some days are better than others and other days you think the kids are just brilliant and you wonder why they haven't done anything wrong*" (Interview, August 10th, 2004). With the feeling of doing everything – facilitating her children's success in school, encouraging them to have pride in their work, and supporting them to willingly attempt a task even though it may be difficult - Cherie can lose her temper on occasion and yell at her children. She is conscious of the effects this has on her children and guiltily works hard at building her children's self-confidence through positive feedback to encourage them to feel comfortable within themselves and to know that it is okay not to have everything done 100 percent correctly.

An enjoyment of art and a good relationship with her children help to make her teaching role easier and more enjoyable. Cherie cannot imagine the difficulties of teaching one of her children if their personalities clashed.

> *I think that I like being with my kids. I'm like a mother hen who likes having my kids gathered around me so I know what they're doing and where they're up to and just wanting to be a part of their lives.* (Interview, November 9th, 2004)

Although Cherie recognizes that her children have less social contact, she is content with the distance education curriculum and believes her children are learning just as much as they would attending a regular primary school. She is continually amazed with how her children develop.

> *I remember with Nathan when he just picked up a book off our bookshelf and read it to us I was like "WOW I actually taught him to read." Probably a proud achievement, "I've done that," an achievement that you don't think is going to happen that hits you by surprise, when they do something really good, "Oh they do listen.*" (Interview, August 10th, 2004)

Teaching her children is rewarding for Cherie. She experiences feelings of great pride in her children's learning achievements, in particular knowing Nathan and Adrian can read, write and spell. She finds satisfaction when any of her children receive an award because she knows she has helped to get them to that stage. "*If they were at a normal school and* *they came home with an award it wouldn't be like you were doing it, you'd probably say 'That's alright, that's good that you've achieved it' but it wouldn't be with your help"* (Interview, September 13th, 2004). Cherie also appreciates being surprised by her children about something they could do or when they are especially helpful, nice or courteous to each other. On the other hand, if her children fail to learn skills or knowledge presented in the curriculum, Cherie blames herself; it is her responsibility as mother and teacher. However, she also sees her two roles as beneficial to her children,

> *I think you get to know where they are and what their limits are so push them a bit more and get a bit more out of them. I think in a way that they'd take a bit more pride in themselves. In a normal school and if they were getting left behind they'd probably lose their self-confidence. This way you can build it up where they can take a bit of pride in themselves and it doesn't matter if it's wrong as long as they've tried.* (Interview, September 13th, 2004)

Having a supportive husband also helps Cherie in teaching and learning with her children. If Jeremy assists in the schoolroom and takes the time to work with one of the children with a particular concept, then Cherie assists Jeremy with mustering or fencing. The deal works both ways. If Cherie helps Jeremy with property work, then he helps Cherie with school work. Cherie compares her family life positively with her friends' relationships with their husbands. She could not live separate lives as they do, with her friends' husbands not having much to do with the children and some enjoying separate holidays from their partners. Jeremy's supportiveness will be particularly important next year with Kyle beginning Year 1 and the more formal school curriculum. Cherie and Jeremy plan to have Nathan begin his school day an hour earlier with his language arts work. Jeremy will take care of the younger children until they join the schoolroom at 8 a.m. Jeremy will do maths with Nathan in the evening for an hour. While Cherie concentrates her efforts on Adrian and Kyle, Nathan will work on his spelling, grammar and Science/Social Studies -- learning his parents have observed he can do more independently.

Cherie also seeks support from the school of distance education staff by calling in at the end of the radio lesson if she needs any resources or has a quick question or message. If one of her children is experiencing difficulties with a topic or concept, she will telephone and ask the teacher if he/she can explain this or she will write the teacher an email requesting any ideas or insights. In addition, Cherie calls other home tutors, especially in Nathan's year level, both for a social call but also when she is having a bad day and needs to have a conversation about the unit of work or a particular activity.

Clusters are something Cherie looks forward to as an opportunity to talk with the boys' teachers about any difficulties and to "*pick the teacher's brains*" about how her children are doing. Attending school events gives the school of distance education teachers the time "*… to see whether the mother really is doing too much for them or where the kids really are in their papers and what they really do know*" (Interview, August 10th, 2004). Cherie also benefits from talking with other home tutors about problems or school information she may have missed. Socially, Nathan, Adrian and Kyle also enjoy being with their teacher and playing with their friends. At the first cluster of each new school year, Cherie and the children appreciate meeting children from their on-air class so they are able to put a face to a name. Minischool provides a further opportunity to meet the entire year level, teachers, parents and children.

Generally, Cherie feels a sense of belonging in the distance education community and she views the families enrolled as a special, elite group. However, Cherie believes her level of involvement in the wider school community reflects that she is "not as committed to her role" and therefore has less opportunity for a greater feeling of school-related belongingness.

> *I'm not on the P&C; I'll listen to it every now and then. I'm there if they want an opinion. I think that there are other mothers that are more dedicated to the school, other mothers have it as their outing and it's their social life. We go to the things; it's not that we don't get involved in anything. It is good on sports skills day and minischools to chat to other mums and teachers and see how they do things. Just what they've been up to, that is an outside life to school.* (Interview, October 4th, 2004)

Sharing views on education, goals and hopes

School education comes first in the Mitchell household, with Cherie and Jeremy feeling great responsibility for their children's learning. It is important for the couple to see their children finish their secondary education.

Cherie is attentive to her role in their lives and is careful not to give any impressions of what they should be choosing as a career.

> *I'd hate to see them say 'We've got to do this just to please mum and dad, we've got to succeed.' I'd hate to think that I've pushed them into that nearly enough is not good enough, that they've got to keep pushing themselves and find that they're not happy later on down the track. I'd just like to see them educated and happy in life. They could be the brightest one but if they don't want to be a doctor or lawyer that it's ok to be a farmer, truck driver. It's ok to do as long as they're happy, but not a druggy.* (Interview, September 13th, 2004)

Furthermore, although Cherie would like her children to succeed, she hopes that through their education her children will learn that life also offers knock backs. She is striving to provide them with the opportunity to do their best but if other people don't see it as good enough, then not to take it to heart. Furthermore, she would also like them to be learning that it is okay not to understand something and hopes her children will have the confidence to ask for help when they require it. If any of her children chose to join Cherie and Jeremy working on the property, she would prefer if they travel and work for a year prior, to see and experience other ways of life. In future years, Cherie would like for her children to be employed in a job with a life they are happy in.

> *I'd like to see them all get married and have kids and grandkids so I can annoy them. I'd like to see them live a good and happy and well-educated life, and maybe they'll thank me one day. A lot of people have forgotten about being happy and family values. I'd hate to see them lose the family values.* (Interview, September 13th, 2004)

CHAPTER 8

BEING HOME TUTORS: KEY DIMENSIONS OF THE EXPERIENCE

Although I observed the three mothers in their home tutor roles in the schoolrooms, I needed to hear them speak, or read what they wrote, about being home tutors in order to grasp how they experienced the role. My observation of their lives on their properties and in their schoolrooms gave me a backdrop of meaning for understanding their words. From listening to the mothers, and studying their comments, I learned how mothers on properties like theirs who serve as home tutors for their children can experience and respond to their multiple roles.

The multiple responsibilities of home, family, and property can limit home tutors' opportunities to plan and prepare more enjoyable schoolroom activities. In this way, the routines of everyday life in the family, in the home, and on the property limit the resources of home tutor time and energy that are available to support everyday life in the schoolrooms.

At the same time, the home tutoring work can negatively affect the way the mothers parent or do home-making. The mothers can experience their parenting roles as qualitatively different from their home tutoring roles. The energy demands, stress or frustration of the home tutoring work can make them less available to parent in the ways that they like to outside of schoolroom time or to home-make for their families more richly. Thus everyday life in the schoolroom also affects everyday life for the family outside of the schoolroom.

The mothers clearly care about their children and want them to have a good education. In the daily schoolroom home tutoring work, a never-ending preoccupation or frustration is not being able to know whether the child is doing well enough. The mothers lack professional background and experience in education that might support their assessment or understanding of their children's progress. It is difficult for them to be confident that their children are doing well enough. In spite of their challenges, however, the mothers experience considerable pride and satisfaction in any opportunities to witness or recognize their children's progress.

Although there are many aspects to the home tutoring experience, in listening deeply to what the mothers have said and written, I would have to say that key dimensions of the home tutors' experience have to do with: time, energy, and stress; ambiguity about children's success; and pride and satisfaction in recognizable achievement on the part of their children.

The mothers' experience of the home tutoring roles reflects the ways in which each schoolroom is a part of the larger place of home and a property for caring for domestic animals. The mothers are motivated to complete the many routines attached to their multiple roles. In order to do so, certain limits or boundaries are set for work related to home tutoring.

Time, energy, and stress

Scheduled time in the schoolroom fits tightly into the routines for the whole day of the families. Even the exact time for smoko, the refreshment break, needs to be honoured so that home tutors can provide refreshments for and visit with husbands and other workers. It can be stressful and exhausting work to support the children in completing all expected tasks within the time frame. Working with more than one child in the schoolroom also requires considerable planning, coordination and multi-tasking for the home tutor. Anything that is added on to the regular activities—for example, extra work with grammar or learning chess for extra-curricular--is typically a source of concern and attention for the home tutors. Changes or delays related to real time communication with distance education staff can also complicate the schoolroom schedule.

The following reflection by Cherie reveals the kind of stress home tutors can experience in the schoolroom.

> *Some days I think I push them too much or expect too much. Sometimes I wish that I could diffuse my brain and cut a wire and say, "Don't get too stressed out, they're doing their best or it doesn't matter if it's not the neatest writing, or it's okay if they get the number facts wrong. It doesn't matter if it takes one minute to get one answer instead of one second." Probably if I could diffuse and be less stressful or uptight. Maybe I should learn more too. Some days if I could just be a relaxed person.* (Interview, September 13th, 2004)

As depicted in the narrative portraits of the families, there is a lot going on in the schoolroom—particularly when there is more than one child there--and there is a lot going on in life outside of schoolroom time. The home tutors can feel the need to mentally shift gears when they go into the schoolroom and then shift back again as soon as they leave. Unlike women who work at paid jobs and then come home to responsibilities, the home tutors do not even have the separation space of travel time. Further, their children want them to be enjoyable parents again immediately upon leaving the schoolroom. Here, for example, Louise comments on her inability to do things with her children immediately after schoolroom time:

> *I don't have the energy to do things with them after, like in the afternoons, before we would be out there mucking around and playing but now its... Probably energy and time. There's just a push on the time, to get things done. We'll come over and finish things [in the schoolroom] and then all of a sudden it'll be "oh come and do this with us" and the last thing that I want to do is something else with them. Now they know that we have lunch and then everyone does something quiet for an hour or so.* (Interview, July 27th, 2004)

Louise and Kate both opted to try to separate schoolroom life and the rest of life. Cherie couldn't stop schoolroom life from continuing into the rest of life and she came to regret that. Here Kate comments on the separation she chose:

> *I know kids just hate it when you are trying to teach them all the time, even when they are out having fun. The home tutor guide says to try and use opportunities when you are cooking with your child, but the home tutor guide writers have never been with your Preschooler and saying "Count how many carrots you cut up, share them into two and what does that get you?" The kids just roll their eyes and can't stand it.* (Interview, October 12th, 2004)

Louise tries to contain the time and energy required for the schoolroom within schoolroom time. During the weekday afternoons and during the weekends she gives priority to activities in the house or around the property. She views the schoolroom as the location for planning and organising school-related curriculum activities and if she is unable to spend time there, planning and organising for the week ahead does not happen. With little time remaining after completing the household chores, the teaching of the day's curriculum work in the schoolroom, and assisting Daniel in property work or management of the property accounts, Louise tends to work straight from the curriculum papers.

Cherie found that she couldn't separate school from everyday life.

> *I wish that I could be one of these people that when school finishes, it ends. But I carry school into our everyday life. ... So there is no fine line between the schoolroom and myself. I'm still me and I bring the school work home and take personal stuff over there some days.* (Interview, November 9th, 2004)

When the VISE tutor came to work in the schoolroom for six weeks and Cherie was relieved of her time in there, she noticed something important. She came to realize that she had been relating to Kyle as "*a little kid*" and that he was in fact "*a little person" who "knows a lot more than [she] thought he did.*"

> *I have learnt from spending some time with Kyle that he knows a lot more than I thought he did. Just in the way that he's a little person now. Things like having a more intelligent conversation. More general knowledge about things. I suppose I never really have sat down to talk to him as a little person and I'll do more of it now. I think I just always treated him just as a little kid not as an individual little person. I feel guilty sometimes that I haven't been giving him the time I should. Since having these last weeks with him hopefully that makes up for some of it. I do enjoy it when the kids come over for smoko and they have really enjoyed it instead of having a quick cuppa and biscuit. We are actually having lots of home made things for a change. Speaking of smoko I better go and start getting it ready. Things are just so great at the moment.* (Dialogue journal, August 18th, 2004)

Both Cherie and Louise found that the home tutoring work was both a drain on their ability to parent well and a drain on their ability to home-make the ways they wanted to. Above, Cherie noted that they were having homemade things for a change when the VISE Tutor was there. Here Louise comments on changes in her home-making.

> *I know that I've become less concerned about the house. My house always used to be nice and tidy and clean, doesn't happen anymore. Probably a lot more easy way to have meals. We used to take a long time to make our own spaghetti sauce and now it's a tin or a jar of spaghetti sauce. You don't realize how sapping it is, energy-wise. You don't have that mental energy to create a sauce. You've worn it out in the mornings trying to do school, think of better ways to do that.* (Interview, July 27th, 2004)

Having more than one child in the schoolroom was demanding for Louise and Cherie. When Kate had only one child left in the schoolroom, however, she felt the pull of other competing interests and activities such as her volunteer work. In the following interview excerpt, Kate reflects on this dynamic.

> *A lot of people had told me that's what would happen once I only had one left in the schoolroom that I wouldn't devote as much time everyday there. I didn't think that I would be as distracted as I am. It's not good really, when Emma was in Year 5 I had Melissa in Grade 2 so I just had to be there and I was always checking on Emma's work and always saying, "Do you want to rethink such and such again?" or "Why did you do such and such?" whereas now every now and then I'd do that with Melissa. She's not getting the constant backup and reinforcement from me. I'm very aware of it but I don't know how to fix it.* (Interview, August 2nd, 2004)

The tensions of multiple roles finally became too much for Louise. In the dialogue journal entries below, she reported on the deliberations she had with her husband about planning to have a governess for the schoolroom next year. Very poignant in these entries are the comments: "*The more I think about it the more I like it. I can start really enjoying the boys again.*" and "*They need someone else in the schoolroom who isn't just there to get the work done. Some games and art would be very welcome by both and revision would do them both the world of good.*"

> November 7th
> *Unit 14 is finished. Thomas's is okay Timothy's is a different story he just won't work. We have had serious talk about getting a governess. I looked through Thomas's grammar book for this unit and got the feeling he really didn't understand some of it, and wondered where I would find the time to spend an extra 10 to 15 minutes a day on grammar. Add the trouble I have been having with Timothy and I do think it might be what they need. I ponder and wonder if it really is what I want, or what is best for the boys. If we decide against a governess we will have to go to full days next year, which will take so much more of my time.*
>
> November 10th
> *Well this unit is better. Thomas's math is easy so taking pressure off. The language is half interesting too which helps. Timothy is behaving a bit better but not his best. He has started crying saying he doesn't know how to do things even when it is basic. The hot weather doesn't help. We are still talking about a governess. We can get a subsidy which will help. I really think it would be best for the boys. They need someone else in the schoolroom who isn't just there to get the work done. Some games and art would be very welcome by both and revision would do them both the world of good.*
>
> November 13th

> *Thursday and Friday were terrible. Timothy has shut down he has no interest or will to do his work. We have found someone to be governess next year we just have to confirm that Ron will put a new house up. The more I think about it the more I like it. I can start really enjoying the boys again*
>
> November 17th
> *Well Timothy has improved this week not perfect but better. Thomas is going really well. The radio reception has not been very good so on air has been difficult. We are all looking forward to the end of the year…I told the boys today about having a governess. Outwardly they were excited but I could see Thomas was a bit unsure. They know the girl and really like her so that should help. I just hope she can handle them.*
>
> End of year,
> *It has been a long term and we were all ready for some fun in the last week. The days seemed to go so quickly even with work getting done. They enjoyed the Christmas activities on the radio though once again reception was a problem. I will miss the schoolroom but I really feel the boys are ready and will truly benefit from a governess.*

In these reflections Louse commented, *"If we decide against a governess we will have to go to full days next year, which will take so much more of my time."* Being home tutors for one's own children when living on properties such as those of the families in this inquiry is very much about time and energy for multiple roles.

Ambiguity

It became apparent to me that Kate, Cherie and Louise all experienced an undercurrent of on-going concern about whether their children were where they are "supposed to be" in their performance or achievements. In the following excerpt Kate expresses her appreciation of feedback from Melissa's teacher when she is at cluster.

> *Another thing I like about cluster is having [Melissa's teacher] make time for all of us Year 5 mums at lunchtime to sit at our children's places and go through their work for the morning, complete with explanations from [Melissa's teacher]. It's good to get her perspective on what the kids are doing, whether we're worrying too much, and to see how the other mums are tackling the same issues. It's funny, but after nine years supervising my kids, that's still something I crave.*

> *...I don't think you ever lose that need to know that you're on track with what you're doing.* (Dialogue journal, August 4th, 2004)

Similarly, Cherie talked about comparing children's work at cluster:

> *I think that you can get a bit picky cause you go around and have look at the other kids' work and you think "That one's done that but mine's not doing that at the moment" or ...I think that it's good that you do have a look at the others kids' work to see whether yours is behind or is going along all right. Just in writing standards, and every now and then you might just walk in and listen and see whether they are listening and paying attention to the teacher or if they just sit there and don't answer for the teacher like they do at home.*
> (Interview, August 10th, 2004)

In the excerpt below, Louse expresses considerable frustration related to questions about where the children should be in their performance and abilities.

> *Because you don't see other children you don't know where the child is supposed to be, what's expected of them. Just, is it normal for the child to be doing this or that? ...and even if you ask the teacher and they say "oh no, he's right" and then you get into school and you... Timothy and I went to one cluster and all of the other children were miles ahead of him. And I hadn't been pushing him because he was miles ahead of where Thomas had been so I thought it was all right. I said to the teacher "why didn't you tell me" and they said "it's alright." I didn't think it was all right looking at the others knowing he could do better. I just hadn't been pushing him cause from my experience he was right but he really wasn't. It's just small things like that. You get an idea of where they fit in and how much more you need to push them.*
> (Interview, July 27th, 2004)

Notions of normality and linear age-related progression are prominent in these comments about where one's child "is supposed to be." Louise has an expectation that there are levels and that levels can be known. As she states on another occasion, "*No parent is going to say where their child is; they don't know what level they're at either. That's the hardest part, not knowing*" (Interview, July 27th, 2004).

Even concrete efforts to reduce ambiguity can be disappointing as the following story from Louise reveals.

> *I spoke to [Thomas' teacher] today about an extra comprehension program for Thomas as I feel he is getting farther behind instead of improving. It is so hard to get any real feedback from [Thomas' teacher] that you don't know if he thinks it is a problem or that you are just a worry wart.* (Dialogue journal, September 2nd, 2004)

The home tutors can also experience ambiguity with a particular component of the curriculum materials. Here Louise expresses how helpful it can be to talk to other parents on such occasions.

> *That's where other parents come in so much, especially if you're having a specific problem with one unit, you phone up a couple of parents and find that that everyone is having problems, most of the time, if it's not specific to the child who doesn't like that subject. If there's a problem in the actual curriculum then almost everyone you talk to is having the similar problem.* (Interview, July 27th, 2004)

In both short term and long term activities, the home tutors can find themselves wondering whether their children are doing well enough, whether they should be "pushing them" more, or whether difficulties are inherent in the curriculum materials or with themselves or their children.

Pride in children's progress

The home tutors were always eager for feedback or validation from the distance education staff. Even on their own, however, they couldn't help noticing the changes in their children's performance or behaviour and they took great satisfaction from this.

In the interview excerpt below, Louise reflects on "milestones" Thomas and Timothy have achieved.

> *The first cluster that Thomas went to without me. All Year 1 I had to stay with him so the first one that he was happy to stay there by himself was an indication that he was progressing. All these competitions that he does just to show that he is actually learning something, he's not failing badly…Timothy got a Principal's award earlier this year for his journal entries. That's rewarding for both of us, that he is at that level.* (Interview, August 17th, 2004)

Similarly, Kate commented on her role in her daughter's learning: "*The rewards are just knowing that you are helping your child get an education. Knowing that I've been able to do that, that you're making a difference to your child's life*" (Interview, August 30th, 2004). Kate's older daughter, Emma, has been successful at boarding school and this has provided further confirmation that the education Kate is providing is of a "good standard".

Cherie remembered beginning her home tutor role and wondering how she was going to teach her first child to read. She views her children learning to read as something they have achieved together.

> *When they first come to you and read a book to you with you reading and they are suddenly reading and you think, "I did that." You stress out – how am I going to do that? With Jeremy once they were counting something out and you thought, "they can count! I didn't realize you could do that." When they actually do something on their own you think that they can do it and we've achieved that together. With Adrian at the start of the year the writing is all over and now he can put a sentence together, he's come a long way, you think that's a big achievement. You know that if they achieve something that you have helped them get there.* (Interview, September 13th, 2004)

Thus, in spite of the daily pressures and on-going ambiguity, all three home tutors are pleased and almost surprised to see what they have helped their children to achieve.

Discussion

The home tutors found it challenging to fulfil their multiple roles in the schoolrooms, in their families, and on their properties. Louise experienced anguish about not having the time and energy to be Thomas and Timothy's educator in a way that she felt was satisfying and satisfactory. Cherie felt she sometimes failed to relate to her children as a mother rather than as a home tutor outside of the schoolroom. Kate wanted to have the time to focus on other aspects of her life, such as her work and volunteer commitments and she attempted to comfortably and guiltlessly make time for these.

Throughout our conversations, particularly with regard to the photographs the women had taken of their daily lives, I was able to hear them being pulled in two directions or juggling two perspectives. One perspective represented a dominant theme in the culture viewing mothers as all-giving, self-sacrificing, quick to respond, passive, nurturing, obliging beings who live through their husbands and offspring (Lawrence Lightfoot, 1978). This was evident in the women's comments about their ability to keep their houses clean and their personal expectations for their roles as wives and mothers. The other perspective reflected a pull to respond to their own needs or desires as well (Anderson & Jack, 1991). For example, as Cherie spoke of her personal interests, she stated, "*School's not my whole life; I'm not a very dedicated parent in that way*" (Interview, August 10th, 2004).

Even though Louise, Kate and Cherie all had in-depth knowledge of their children's abilities and interests, they experienced considerable discomfort about not knowing whether their children's achievements were at an appropriate level and whether their children were meeting the expectations of the distance education school staff teachers. Although the home tutors are fairly versatile in assessing and addressing their children's learning needs, their lack of professional backgrounds in teaching and child development shape and limit their understandings and actions.

The school-organized events such as clusters and minischools offer social experiences and an opportunity to meet with other families enrolled in the distance education program. The stories from these home tutors showed that their preoccupation with comparing their children's performance with that of other children pre-empted any attention they might have given to teaching approaches being modelled by distance education staff to support the development of the home tutors' pedagogical knowledge.

CHAPTER 9

THE CHILDREN'S EVERYDAY LIVES

In this chapter I endeavour to provide a window into the nature of the everyday lives of the children in this study. Having a sense of their everyday lives outside of the schoolroom helps me to appreciate how they may experience everyday life within the schoolroom. A holistic view of their everyday lives also alerts me to the identities they are creating in those lives and bringing with them into the schoolroom.

Place was a useful conceptual framework for learning about the children's everyday lives. In my inquiry activities I sought to learn about the places children used or liked, and how and why. I began this research understanding that children typically value places that provide opportunities for social affiliation and creative expression or self-development. The latter two can take the form of imaginative play in undefined space or trying out pre-defined roles or responsibilities in conventional settings (Chawla, 1992).

I was able to observe and participate with Thomas, Timothy, Melissa, Nathan, Adrian, Kyle and Paul in many places which were available to them on their properties. They showed me many places that they used. They had me play with them in many places. And I observed them interacting with family members and workers in many different places.

Everyday life outside of the schoolroom

Thomas, Timothy, Melissa, Nathan, Adrian, Kyle and Paul all used the indoors, house yard and the nearby surrounding area beyond the yard fence. They often had the opportunity to wander by themselves on foot, or with each other in the absence of an adult, or to explore on motorbike, bicycle or horse. Melissa, the only girl in the study, enjoyed activities such as horse riding, bike riding and exploring just as the boys did, but more commonly used the area outside the house yard only when in the company of other children such as her sister Emma and friends from nearby properties. This section gives an overview of the kinds of places the children talked about and the kinds of everyday life activities they enjoyed in the places available to them.

Dangerous places

The children were aware of dangerous places on their properties and knew of their responsibilities for keeping safe. The Michaelson and Mitchell siblings knew that the dams were dangerous to go to, as the water was too deep. They needed to ask before going to these water places and are usually required to be accompanied by an adult. Timothy spoke of the pig cages as being dangerous because of the wild, dangerous bulls. He has seen one cut the jackaroo's leg open, cut a dog's chest open and also stab the dog's leg with its tusk. Thomas recalled that the shed was a dangerous place to go to when the weather is windy and they were not allowed there during that kind of weather. Nathan said that the hills were dangerous and they were not permitted to go there by themselves as the hills are steep and climbing them may cause a broken neck if there was a fall. Adrian once enjoyed going to the shearing quarters by himself as he could make himself a hot cup of tea, however, since the oven was left on he has been required to ask his parents for permission to go there.

House yard use

The children made use of their house yards before school, during smoko or after school. The Michaelson, Carson and Mitchell families' house yards were enclosed with fences on all sides and had several gates along their borders. The fences kept sheep, cattle, and horses outside so the families could grow lawns and gardens. The house yards were extensive and had flat, open lawn areas, one or more large trees, garden beds, pathways and a trampoline. The house yards were also home to pets with dogs wandering freely in the Michaelson's yard, guinea pigs in a relocatable cage in the Carson's yard and both wild and tame birds in an aviary in the Mitchell's yard. The Carson and Mitchell families also had outdoor pools. The house yards were used for role playing such as in the tree or cubby house; playing rule games such as football, netball, cricket or soccer; swimming in the pool and playing with water from the garden hose; and being in peace and quiet.

During our conversations about the photographs of their favourite places, the four Mitchell siblings became very animated when looking at photographs of the large fruit and vegetable garden as they like to eat the mulberries and pick the other fruit. The trees were also a part of the garden they enjoyed as they could climb to the top and see the view.

Areas surrounding the house yards

The immediate surroundings included spaces such as gullies that the children used for designing tracks and jumps for riding bicycles, motorbikes or horses and for digging and building structures to destroy and remake. There were also many places to hide in and explore. Thomas, Timothy, Nathan, Adrian and Melissa felt fortunate that, unlike most children their age, they could go mustering on motorbikes and drive cars.

Social affiliation

Although they lived in isolated locations, the Michaelson, Carson, and Mitchell children had many opportunities for interaction with both peers and adults. In each of the families, the siblings spent time with each other, with their parents, the jackaroo, or friends with whom they exchanged visits. All of the families attended community, sporting and school-organized events. Both the children and the home tutors spoke positively about such school-organized events as clusters, minischools and sports skills days. The home tutors' also valued the daily radio lessons as an opportunity for interaction with peers and teachers.

Kate's recollection of the non-academic events at a minischool Melissa attended reveals gives a sense of the fun the children have together.

> *I arrived too late to watch the mock battle - lots of sponges, water and tiggy involved. Luckily it was a very warm week. The Fruit Olympics on Wednesday night started off with teams of four being given a country name and packs of craft items from which to make a costume to match. The two boys on Melissa's team rolled around laughing at each other and were no use at all, so Rachael dressed Melissa, with Melissa giving directions - can't you just picture it. Another Mum and I were the judges - we gave them 5/5 for creativity but 3/5 for teamwork. Other events included an orange relay (passing oranges with feet), a lemon push (rolling it with a pencil along floor) and archery apple (a balancing race).*
>
> *The highlight of course was the disco on Thursday night. I totally embarrassed Melissa twice - first by turning up in my [costume] and then by singing along with the karaoke machine! What else are mothers for, except to humiliate their children! I believe there was quite a bit of audible anticipation of the disco in class early in the week, but more with regard to which boy was going to dance with which girl! Some of the mums told me this was a carryover from the [school] camp – I was completely unaware of this – either Melissa's not interested or she's not telling me. Anyway, a funny sideline occurred when I walked into the girls' dorm on Tuesday evening just after I arrived. Everyone was getting their hair*

> *done in amazing styles (a Year 7 sibling was the hairdresser). I said that everyone looked like they were getting ready for a wedding and was quickly told that they weren't allowed to talk about that sort of thing! It seems the teachers nipped all romantic discussions in the bud very early, thankfully.*
> (Dialogue journal, August 27th, 2004)

Melissa said she enjoyed the variety of sports organized before school, the disco where she dressed up, the class' presentation of their screen-printing and the chance to meet up with her friends she doesn't have the opportunity to see very often.

Nathan, too, really enjoyed his last minischool. He finds minischool fun and goes to learn about the theme his teacher chooses and to visit with his teachers and friends for a week. Nathan finds his teachers help him learn in areas where he needs help and he can also ask his teachers questions and get to know them better. The minischool week for Nathan could be better if they were given the opportunity to play more sport and see more places outside of the school of distance education grounds. Cluster days for Nathan are fun! He likes seeing friends and teachers. His favourite part of the day is playing sport with friends during recess or lunch.

Places for retreat

All of the children had places of retreat and used these places for different reasons. In his exploration of the ways in which 191 children see and experience places, Sobel (1990) highlighted that the children in his study knew the importance of places for hiding out by themselves where they could not be seen by parents, siblings and teachers. In her hermeneutic of the film, *Chocolat*, Ellis (2002, p. 78) comments on the significance of children's places for retreat.

> It is noteworthy that when Anouk comes home in tears, she does not rush to her mother's arms but instead seeks comfort in her private nook, a large empty fireplace draped over by a curtain. The production of a private place that can

> serve as a refuge is an accomplishment attesting to the child's growing skill and independence (Chawla, 1992). Cherished places such as this nook become internalized as resources to provide serenity in times of trouble.

Thomas, Timothy, Nathan and Adrian told me that they go to their bedroom or bed when feeling sad or would like to be alone. In addition, the four Mitchell siblings felt that the cubby house was a good place to go when they were feeling annoyed because it is a place of their own. Nathan most noticeably enjoys time by himself, especially when his younger siblings are annoying him. In fact, Nathan would like to redesign the existing cubby in the house yard into a tree house to his liking. He said, "*I would sleep there at night and have a 'no kids allowed' sign. I'd build a lookout; have a fridge, food, chocolate. A gun just in case for pigs, snakes, wild cats, a shower…*" (Interview, August 10th, 2004).

My field notes (August 16th, 2004) tell of the time Thomas and Timothy introduced me to their secret place, a place of retreat.

> *Thomas had been talking about going on a picnic all day so after school he, Timothy, the family dog and I climbed onto the four-wheeler motorbike and went to the boys' secret place. Louise helped us pack some snacks to eat and drink and Thomas placed this cooler in the front basket on the motorbike. This is a place they go to by themselves or with childhood friends. At this place, they are out of view from the house and they are familiar with the areas surrounding it. At this place, they have a cubby created by floodwaters – branches and debris stuck on a tree to make a wonderful place to sit in the shade. There is a creek bed to explore and its two banks on either side. Here they can see crabs and birds, depending on the time of the year.*
>
> *We were all surprised that an hour and a half had passed since we left home. The time went by quickly sitting in the cubby house eating our picnic. Well, I sat just outside the door, close to the boys and in view as the space was extremely cramped and low; even though Thomas insisted I go in there. We spent our time playing a new Olympic sport the boys invented – throwing sticks up toward the tree branches. A score was given each time the stick stayed in the tree. We spent our time playing follow the leader. I jumped and climbed down, up and over things I hadn't in a very long time and I appreciated the encouragement from the boys after I reminded them how old I was!*

> *The boys also told me about the time they had come down with their two friends from a property not far from them.*
> *On our return trip, we stopped at three graves we saw on the way to the secret place. Thomas and Timothy had been told the sad story of the people whose bodies were lying there. Apparently, the child died and the mother and father committed suicide. The property is so remote and this happened in the 1970s. I wonder for how long time had passed for the family to be found. I wonder what caused the mother and father to kill themselves. Was it only the death of their daughter? I did not share my further wonderings with the boys.*
> *Thomas drove us safely home.*

Louise has been to all the boys' favourite places except to the area of the creek where their cubby is situated and where they spend time with friends and have picnics. I felt privileged to be able to share in the boys' special place. Speaking about the cubby at the creek Thomas says, "*I like going there to play, not everyone knows about it*" (Interview, July 26th, 2004). The boys also appreciated other places for being by themselves. Timothy liked going to his bedroom or the toy room while Thomas preferred the other two cubbies. According to Thomas, the cubbies are good places for hiding and watching things from. He feels they are his own because he built them. Thomas and Timothy also take care of their cubbies, keeping them clean inside. When it rains, the cubby at the creek requires raking as prickles get washed onto the cubby floor.

With Emma away at boarding school, Melissa spent a lot of time alone quietly resting, drawing, playing games, creating craftwork, or reading. These activities were not necessarily for retreat but as activities she enjoys doing in a variety of places in the house. Melissa's times of retreat appeared to include the company of animals.

Imaginative play in undefined space

Research by Rasmussen (2004) and others (e.g., Bartlett 1990; Hart 1978; Hester 1985) has shown that children prefer to play in naturalistic places rather than those that are landscaped. Malleable environments provide better opportunity for imaginative play (Chawla, 1992). The following entry from my field notes (October 3rd, 2004) tells of the large, open, rugged space south of the Mitchell's house yard that the four siblings formed as a golf course.

> *After lunch we then played some golf, an activity I have not done with the boys before. Nathan and Adrian knew where the golf clubs were in one of the rooms of the donger and we collected some golf balls there too. Now, where would our course be? Our course was the land outside of the fence surrounding the house and its gardens. Nathan suggested we tee off from the mound of garden dirt to the large tree in the open space a little to the left. From there, we would tee off to another tree further west. We had planned to go to the ditch also where they ride their motorbikes but we changed our minds and turned around at the last tree and made our way back over the same course to the beginning. We shared the golf clubs and toward the end the boys suggested that we did not need to keep score as the point was to have fun. The mound of garden soil used as the final "green" for the game became a place for Nathan, Adrian, Kyle and Paul to play for the next 30 minutes. They devised a game of getting the golf ball to the top of the mound. This was entertaining for them and a challenge also.*

Nathan and Adrian also used two old cars on the northern end past the house yard fence for play. Adrian particularly enjoys the orange car and he likes to play in it and pretends to sell things from it, "*Sometimes Mum and Dad come and buy things like coffee and ice-cream*!" Adrian prefers the blue car, selling vegetables and fish and chips from it. Nathan also recalls, *"Sometimes I go roo-shooting in it with my gun and knife!"* (Interview, October 3rd, 2004).

I observed that the children in both the Michaelson and Mitchell families spent a large amount of time adapting places for themselves and planning and implementing fantasy play in unstructured and structured places. The places they spent most time in and the activities they did in these places involved bodily action and appeared to fulfil the boys' need for exertion, for building and for playing games. Many of the places available to the children were ones in which they could have unstructured interaction.

As noted earlier, Melissa tended to use the space beyond the house yard when there was someone to do this with such as her sister or friends from nearby properties. Also Kate exercised more input into Melissa's out-of-school activities than Louise and Cherie did with their sons. Kate spent less time outdoors than Louise and Cherie due to work and volunteer commitments requiring her to be in the office; and consequently, in order to have company Melissa needed to be indoors or in the house yard.

Work

The children spent long periods of time alongside their mothers, fathers or the property workers before and after school, on weekends and during the holidays. The children's participation in work involved responsibility, positive interactions talking and learning with adults and self-development through problem solving and encouragement and feedback from family. Below are some examples of the kinds of real life work and learning the children engage in.

One Sunday when I arrived at the Mitchell family's property, they looked exhausted and I learned that they had been camping the previous night 80 kilometres away to do fencing. The flies were numerous and the fencing was rough work with the uneven creek bed and the heat. It was a long day beginning at 5 a.m. with Nathan waking and cooking the family bacon on the campfire. The day had also included attempts at catching wild rabbits and foxes which cause destruction to the environment. The family's exhaustion carried over into the school learning place the following day.

The following is a reflection by Melissa about her learning experiences with mustering.

> *When I muster, cause every time I muster I get better...If a sheep looks as if it is going to go that way you've got to be there before it happens, otherwise they all go over there. Dad's had lots of experience and he says that sometimes if you run really close behind a sheep or a cow and they just fall down for no reason, because they are scared. As soon as you turn away from them they gallop in the other direction. Mustering is fun but you learn things as well. You've just got to know from experience from that.* (Interview, November 1st, 2004)

The following excerpt from my field notes (October 19th, 2004) tells of a calf rescue and Louise's anticipation of the further work ahead that Thomas and Timothy would experience.

> *We rescued a calf after school today. The family had seen it being born during their muster last Thursday so had the time today to go to the dam where they dropped mother and child to see if the calf was okay. The family had suspected the mother was "mad" and would leave the calf behind. She had in fact left it under a tree and the poor thing could not walk. Louise and Thomas carried it into the back of the truck and put it in a large pen at home. Before Daniel left town he called up to see if he would need to buy some special formula of milk for it. The boys named the calf after their favourite football team. Louise mentioned that the boys are excited and do not realize how much work it could be to get the calf to begin drinking the milk – it would take hours. I leave their place later than usual but very glad for the experience.*

On another occasion I was there to see Nathan and Adrian working with their father, Jeremy, to build a motorbike from two older ones.

> *We played on the trampoline for a while and then Nathan invited me to go with him over to the shed. I observed (and learnt a lot about) fixing a motorbike – they used two older bikes to create one good bike. Jeremy played a major role in teaching Nathan and Adrian new things as well as guiding them to be independent in what they already knew. Jeremy gave the boys jobs to do, expecting them to know tools or to find a tool for a certain job.*
>
> *There seemed to be rivalry between Nathan and Adrian and Jeremy added to this by verbally highlighting the difference in the two boys' work. Nathan would put half an effort in doing something and Adrian would stick at something until it was done. A debate between the two boys began about who knew more – very*

> *interesting as Nathan first referred to school work then his father mentioned he was a lot older than Adrian so he had to think of questions about practical stuff. Nathan asked a question about football – sports as practical.*
>
> *I also learned a lot through our conversations about the change from horse to motorbike in the 1980's for mustering and other property work, and the advantages and disadvantages of both forms of transport.*
>
> *We needed a part for the motorbike so went to the dump to look for it. Adrian took me on the back of the four-wheeler, very fast and going over all the bumps possible!*
>
> *The motorbike finally got up and running and Nathan rode around in it while his Dad double-checked that everything looked okay.*
> (Green, field notes, October 4th, 2004)

Perhaps my most moving experience of watching the children work was the day I witnessed lamb marking with Melissa as a full participant. The following field note entry recorded my experience.

> *The highlight of this week's research visit was experiencing lamb marking (mulesing). As we finished eating our lunch, John and the worker came home for their lunch. This was the first time I had seen John all day. They needed a helper so Kate said Melissa was free this afternoon. Kate went to the office to do more work until the men arrived in the top paddock where the lamb marking was to happen. Melissa went outside to play with her guinea pigs and went onto the computer to play games while we waited for Kate. Kate was vacuuming the spare room for the worker and putting on clean linen. Kate continued to look out for the men when they came into the top yards with the sheep. As they did, Kate asked Melissa to put on her work clothes if she would like to help her Dad. She said she did and Kate said, 'I know he would really appreciate your help.' The phone rang at that moment so Melissa and I went ahead up to the yards while Kate followed a little later behind.*
>
> *I had no idea what lamb marking was. Draughting was done first though. Over 300 sheep (of 3000 on the property) being coerced into single file to be sorted by moving a gate for them to go into different holding pens - lambs one side, ewes the other. This in itself is a skill manoeuvring the gate quickly enough. Melissa explained how she was doing the sorting and gave me some directions when some sheep got out of the fenced area.*
> *Second, counting the ewes and moving them to another holding pen in the process. At this point, the "baaing" became extraordinarily loud with mother and children separated!*

This flock had already been jet sprayed for ticks, lice, etc. so the next task, and last, was preparing for lamb marking. Sharpening cutting scalpels and shears, filling old saucepans with chemicals to prevent 'fly' around the crutch, having ear tags and ear hole punchers ready to go. A small group of lambs are let in at one time closest to the four pieces of special equipment which the sheep are placed on, legs in the air.

The process begins, with "Mum" suggesting I just watch and not have a job. It was not until they started that I appreciated this - observing is very different from doing! Tails cut off, testicles removed, groins shawn, ears punched to identify sex for later sorting ventures and then tagged. The sheep are then flipped off the contraption onto the ground bleating and bleeding looking for their mother. I was standing about two metres away and ended up covered in quite a lot of blood! After one hour standing in the sun happy to watch but not being helpful in the doing, smelling unfamiliar potent liquid and observing blood, I realized I was feeling nauseous and very thirsty. My head was beginning to pound so I went back to the house for 45 minutes for a drink and lay down.

When I returned to the yards, there were only about 20 sheep left. John the crotcher, the worker and Kate the ear punchers and taggers and Melissa the painter of chemicals had worked on 221 lambs. I was surprised at how much difference in size/age there was between many of them. Kate and the worker worked very hard physically exerting themselves to lift the animals and struggle with them. Melissa complained only once of a sore wrist from holding the saucepan of chemicals in which she dipped the paintbrush to smother their fresh wounds. John guided Melissa through the process to ensure the job was being done well, otherwise the sheep would die from being fly struck. John was also very encouraging toward Melissa.

I learned a lot about sheep – gestation period of 5 months, therefore ewes can have 3 lambs in two years but with the drought this is not possible. Sheep have two layers of skin. Family begins with 3000 sheep but only 1500 left at the end of the dry season.

It sounds inhumane but I am told if this process is not carried out, the sheep become infested with flies and will die. They already lose about half of their stock each year at the end of the dry season. As the flock were being draughted into a paddock a lamb was born by a fence as the mother was walking along! It was lovely to see. It slowly stumbled along, being expected to follow its mother within minutes of being born.

That evening I was grateful to be helping prepare beef for dinner and not a roast lamb or lamb chops! Kate shared that they choose not to look after any lambs left by their mother but she would look after potty calves. We also talked about the

> *stealing of stock which still occurs, especially in northern Queensland and the role Stock Agents in controlling this.*
> (Green, field notes, October 11th, 2004)

The children's work and participation in everyday life on their properties showed learning as an integral part of their family and community membership. In the excerpt below, Wenger (1998, p.8) contrasts such learning with notions of learning attached to schooling.

> For many of us, the concept of learning immediately conjures up images of classrooms, training sessions, teachers, textbooks, homework, and exercises. Yet, in our experience, learning is an integral part of our everyday lives. It is part of our participation in our communities and organizations. The problem is not that we do not know this, but rather we do not have very systematic ways of talking about this familiar experience.

The following subsection offers a synopsis of the children's everyday life in their schoolrooms and how learning was experienced there.

Everyday life inside the schoolrooms

In reflecting upon the creation of programs for young children, Fleer (2003, p. 66) suggests,

> …we have further removed children from the day-today world and placed them in an artificial world – one geared to their needs, where they are central, but separated from the real world. We have created an artificial world – with child-sized furniture and home equipment, materials such as thick paint brushes, blocks and puzzles, and an outdoor area with carefully designed climbing equipment for safety.

Following the GSDE guidelines, Louise, Kate and Cherie created prescribed, artificial, child-sized worlds such that described by Fleer. As they doggedly followed the daily plans in the curriculum materials, they gave sharp direction to everyday life in the schoolrooms. The children's own abilities, interests, and propensities interfaced with the daily regimens to render a less than positive emotional significance for the schoolroom as a place. It was not a favourite place for any of the children.

Nathan, Adrian, Kyle, Paul, Melissa, Thomas and Timothy were familiar with daily routines, the locations of resources, and the rules for how to complete specific activities. There were many instances during my observations when the VISE tutors were present when the children would question the routine and or would tell tutors where to find or store resources. Rules and expectations were also well known to the children. For example, Adrian knew he was not to look at the charts on the walls to help him with his spelling. Even Kyle and Paul, who were the newest to the schoolroom, had become knowledgeable about it through observation and participation with their older siblings and Cherie. Although all of the children—Timothy, Thomas, Nathan, Adrian, Kyle, Paul, and Melissa—were knowledgeable about their schoolrooms, each experienced it in a distinctive way.

Thomas

Thomas, who, was given responsibilities outside of the school learning place and could meet these responsibilities, struggled with his confidence in his academic abilities in the schoolroom. His preference was to work with his father doing activities. His behaviour and actions in the schoolroom appeared to express a desire for independence or autonomy, especially in regard to his mother's surveillance. The VISE tutors did not give Thomas the space that he wanted and this made it difficult for Thomas to have any positive feelings associated with the school learning place during the six weeks the VISE tutors were at the Michaelson's. Although Thomas expressed that he didn't like school, he did talk about his preference for having his mum in the schoolroom "*...because she is* *not always with you"* (Interview, September 5th, 2004), meaning his mother respected his need to work independently once he understood the activity he was to complete.

The curriculum materials promote children working independently, however, this predominantly meant working alone, rather than having opportunity for autonomous inquiry and exploration. Thomas is very physically capable and his interests include doing anything that is active. Thomas has difficulty comprehending written language and the "school day" requires sitting still for longer periods of time. These two factors contribute to Thomas' unenthusiastic response to school learning activities and mask his knowledge of topics and skills. He often surprises Louise with what he has grasped and can recall.

Timothy

Thomas's younger brother, Timothy, loves to talk and uses spoken language for a range of purposes while interacting with peers and familiar adults. He has a broad imagination which enables him to find a space and play, for example, at constructing a garage and creating real life problems for the people in that particular workplace. However, in the school learning place, he has less opportunity to share his imaginative thoughts in the process of completing the distance education curriculum. Timothy has enjoyed writing and once happily expressed his imaginative ideas articulately through stories. Recently, though, he can be heard saying, "I hate writing"—a statement frequently made by his older brother.

Louise has noticed the change in Timothy's attitude and attributes it to working closely with Thomas and experiencing feelings of boredom with the formal school learning activities. Timothy makes use of logical thought and has a brilliant memory for detail, while Thomas is more practically orientated. Timothy finds most things interesting - facts and figures and other little bits of information. Timothy remembers much of the curriculum work Thomas completed the last two years. He is experiencing boredom and frustration that there is little opportunity for verbal interaction in the school learning place and few opportunities for positive challenges.

Furthermore, both Timothy and Thomas are intelligent human beings who diversely reveal their learning styles, capabilities, and preferences for modes of solving problems. They are knowledgeable about the property and the cattle stock. Yet when questioned about adapting the curriculum, Louise says, "*…it's pretty well what's on paper is what comes out. I believe that we've got everything out onto paper*" (Interview, September 6th, 2004).

Nathan

The Mitchell school learning place is busy and there are many things happening at once. Nathan values both individual time with his mother and time away from his three younger siblings. Neither of these are afforded by the majority of the five hours of the "school day." Regarding his schoolroom experience, Nathan spoke about his siblings and wishing they were not there all of the time. He also spoke about the things he liked doing with his mum one-on-one outside of the schoolroom. I also observed him spending time by himself outside of the schoolroom. Both Nathan and Cherie said he does create these opportunities for himself to be alone from his siblings.

Nathan said that he enjoyed doing art as his mother enjoys art and they work on projects together. He also said that he finds school difficult and that going to school is probably the hardest thing about being his age, especially writing stories (grammar is easy as it requires short answers!) He would prefer to do writing at school-organized events with his teacher, suggesting his appreciation of the one-on-one time with his teacher and the opportunity to talk about his story ideas with peers.

Adrian

Adrian is physically active, swinging on his chair, for example, in contrast to Nathan who sits with little movement. Adrian says that he doesn't like "school" and would rather be in Preschool as he likes to play. Like Thomas, Adrian's physical energy accumulates in the school learning place. At smoko time or at the end of the "school day" he seemed to physically burst out of the schoolroom door and run or travel by bike to other places--places which are not specifically planned for children, free from adult authority and malleable both physically and imaginatively.

Melissa

Melissa is a friendly and polite child who likes to directly express what she is thinking to ask or comment upon. She is generally receptive and open to all curriculum activities, although she tends to react instantly with an unenthusiastic facial expression, sound or brief comment. As Kate explains,

> *She puts on a bit of show sometimes and says "no" and she says that she doesn't like doing things, but I think that she knows that if you say "no" now you just have to go back later and do it so it's better to get it over and done with rather than making the day go on.* (Interview, August 30th, 2004)

In the schoolroom, as a student working with her mother, she displays varying abilities depending on the curriculum activities. In a usual school day, there are some things that Melissa works at by herself, some things that she feels comfortable enough with to challenge Kate's knowledge and understanding, and other things that she needs help with.

She willingly completes the learning activities as long as her self-image is not tainted with embarrassment. Melissa becomes defensive, frustrated and annoyed toward her mother on occasion, especially when asked to review her work or to redo an activity.

Outside the schoolroom, Melissa is involved in activities she chooses and enjoys. Many of these activities are open-ended activities which positively challenge her and which bring her satisfaction and pride. There is more room for mistakes, less adult (or curriculum) input for how things should be completed, and more space for inquiry and exploration. Langhout (2003, p. 238) similarly found in her study that "the children interviewed disliked places where they had less autonomy, choice, and where they perceived a large power differential between the students and adults."

With their focus on task completion, and their commonsense ideas about school learning activities, Louise, Kate and Cherie failed to better accommodate their children's individual strengths and other characteristics. Given the home tutors' expectations and ways of proceeding in the schoolrooms, Nathan, Adrian, Kyle, Paul, Melissa, Thomas and Timothy showed signs of dislike for the lack of opportunity for autonomy, independence, social interaction, and creative expression and exploration. The schoolroom experience stood in strong contrast to their experiences in the other places of their everyday lives.

Discussion

The places the children photographed were attributed special meaning. For each of the children, the schoolroom was commonly experienced as having a negative significance. It was bearable for them, however, because of their home tutors, their mothers, with whom they have close relationships. Louise, Kate and Cherie are significant people in their children's lives.

In his work with "affordances," Gibson (1997) stressed that the affordances of an environment that are the most significant are social in nature, that is, affordances provided by other human beings in way of positive (nurturing) and negative (arguing) interactions (Clark & Uzzell, 2002). Derr (2002, p. 129) also found that "many children also consistently expressed the desire for interactions to be shared with family and friends, and at times, this desire for relationships was of greater importance than the location of the experience." For Thomas, Timothy, Melissa, Nathan, Adrian, Kyle and Paul, this also appeared true. The observational field notes and the conversations with the children highlighted that regardless of whether the children were in "children's places" or "places for children," they predominantly appreciated the relationships and the interaction experienced there. In the schoolrooms, however, the mothers' otherwise multi-faceted relationships with their children were constrained.

CHAPTER 10

FROM SCHOOLROOM TO "SCHOOL LEARNING PLACE"

As the home tutors and students spend just over 150 days of the year in their schoolrooms, these spaces are transformed into places as they become invested with meaning by the mothers and children. The place that evolves in each family's schoolroom is what I am referring to as the "school learning place." The place that evolves in a schoolroom, or, "the whole experience of being there" (Ellis, In press) results from the way in which it is inhabited—through the forms of everyday life occurring there. In Ashcroft's discussion, place is what results or evolves from the way people spend their time in a location and the identities of the inhabitants affect their mode of inhabitation. In Eyles' (1989) argument, place is treated as the source of structures that constrain the way people can inhabit or can shape everyday lives. Ellis (In press, 1994) emphasizes educators' agency and responsibility for many of the rules, resources, and available relationships that become structural constraints or enablers of everyday life in classrooms. These ideas, taken together, are pertinent to my examination of experience in the families' schoolrooms.

Ashcroft (2001) suggests that the way people inhabit a place is bound up with their culture and identity. As discussed in chapter 8, a number of aspects of the home tutors' identities predisposed them to inhabit the schoolrooms in particular ways. They were motivated to also complete the everyday life routines associated with their home, family, and property roles. They lacked professional backgrounds in education and even stated that they were not interested in being teachers. At the same time, because they wanted their children to have successful educations, they felt pressured to put pressure on their children to complete all prescribed work for each day within time limits that fit into the rest of the day on the property. As discussed in chapter 9, the children liked being with their mothers and spoke positively about spending time with them in various places doing various activities. Valuing a relationship with one's mother, and being motivated to spend time with one's mother was an aspect of each child's identity. Having their mothers as home tutors seemed to make everyday life in the schoolrooms as bearable as it was for the children. This chapter will elaborate such findings of my analyses in the form of an interpretive account of the evolution of the school learning places.

In discussing the everyday life that evolves in a place, Eyles (1989) emphasizes the significance of structural formations—rules, resources and available relationships with individuals, ideas and institutions--in limiting the everyday lives that are possible in a place. He notes that as everyday life begins to take shape, it becomes a structure that further limits the everyday lives people can shape for themselves. Throughout my inquiry, I kept all of these ideas in mind as I chose what to observe, record, or ask questions about. In seeing *place* as everyday life, the whole experience of being there, I paid attention to what everyday life was like. The ideas about *place* were ones I found helpful for discerning the nature of the school learning places and how they had been evolving in the lives of each of the three families. The ideas served as a framework to guide my analysis of the evolution of the school learning places for the three families. Specifically, I paid attention to how:

- The **resources** in the form of curriculum guides and materials, as well as on-air communication support gave shape to everyday life in the schoolrooms (e.g. the physical arrangements of the space, routines, the roles assumed by the home tutors, and the interactions between home tutors and children).

- The **rules** and evolving **routines** constrained everyday life and available relationships in the schoolrooms.

- The **absence of certain kinds of resources or relationships** influenced everyday life in the schoolrooms, particularly in terms of the roles assumed by home tutors. To critically interpret how place constrains everyday life and identity, it can be helpful to consider not only the resources and relationships that are present, but also those that are absent.

- The **identities** the inhabitants brought with them into the schoolrooms affected everyday life, routines and interactions--particularly home tutors' everyday lives outside of the schoolroom and their previous experiences related to education.

- **Available relationships** affected everyday life (pedagogical relationships between children and home tutors; presence or absence of siblings; whether children had had previous face-to-face relationships with on-air teachers). The relationships that are available within a place are those that are developed through everyday life in that space. As relationships evolve through daily routines and interactions, they become the relationships that are then available to further contribute to or shape everyday life.

In this chapter I present an interpretive account of how everyday life in the schoolrooms unfolded as it did. At the end of this interpretive account, and prior to the discussion of it, I present Table 1 which lists a number of examples of how the *place* ideas from Eyles (1989) and Ashcroft (2001) informed my development of this account. Although I discuss the school learning places as they were by the end of my data collection time, I recognize that each one was a continuing culmination of events, stories, established and dishevelled routines, and subjective or inter-subjective creations reflecting histories of human interaction (Ellis, 2003).

The "how" and "why" of the school learning place experience

Because the three families valued both family life and the lifestyle afforded by their properties, home educating became the first choice option. The mothers chose to be home tutors in their distance education programs because of the costs of engaging governesses to take this role. Once in the program, the distance education materials -- a key resource in the schoolroom -- largely set the tone and the pace of their home tutoring activities with their children. The women's own previous and current experiences did not help them to be more confident, flexible, or imaginative with the learning activities. Further, without an interest in teaching and with the competing demands of either chores or more enjoyable pursuits, each day of the distance education program became one more thing that had to be done. The children thought their mothers were happier and more enjoyable to be with outside of the schoolroom.

Choosing distance education and home tutoring

Louise, Kate and Cherie loved their children dearly and one of the main reasons for living on a property was to give their children a "good life." They believed living on a property was a good lifestyle for the entire family. With this decision came the choice as to how to educate their children. Rather than moving into town and living there during the week so their children could attend a regular school, the women spoke of their decision to be home tutors. Each one did this so their entire family could be together continuously throughout the weeks of a school year. For example, in the following interview excerpt Kate reflects on the decision.

> *The alternatives would be to send them into town to board in town or to live in town myself and split the family up. I could get a governess but that would be a*

> *financial strain. A choice is there but in relation to splitting the family or the financial strain, there is no choice.* (Interview, August 30th, 2004)

The mothers accepted the role of home tutors and saw it as a serious responsibility. They valued education highly and believed their children's formal school years would equip them with the skills, knowledge, attitudes and work habits that would provide opportunities for success. As Cherie expresses,

> *In today's world they really need an education. You've heard me say that if they don't learn they won't be able to get a job and buy their things. I think they really need their education to succeed today. It's not like back when a little bit would get you passed. I see their education as their future, how much they learn is how well they are going to go on and do things.* (Interview, September 13th, 2004)

Kate's comments below indicate an expectation that an education makes it possible for people to do what they want to do.

> *I want them to be happy in their life. They can be shovelling dirt for all I care, so long as they are happy doing it. And the ability to acquire the skills to do what they want to do. I think that if you are happy in your work, most of us are working for a living, so that makes you satisfied.* (Interview, August 30th, 2004)

Louise's comments below revealed a multi-faceted view of the importance of education.

> *It all works together. If you can't read, write and do maths you can't get anywhere in this present world. If you can't work together with someone in a tight spot, if you end up in an office in the city, it's that crowded that at least the experience of being in the small schoolroom will come back to them, "I know I've got to just sit and concentrate and block out the noises." Of course at the clusters, the socializing, learning to deal with others and listen to the teachers, so it's all just a puzzle helping them to get there.* (Interview, August 17th, 2004)

Louise, Kate and Cherie are mothers who care for their children, want to give them a good lifestyle, and want to ensure that they have a good education. Thus they began their home tutoring work with the support of the Gorman School of Distance Education.

The distance education materials

The Gorman School of Distance Education (GSDE) materials are a primary resource for the home tutors and their children. The materials clearly state learning objectives and curriculum outcomes. Each day of work provides a very descriptive and prescriptive account of the learning activities and outlines the home tutor and student's tasks, roles and responsibilities. The curriculum activities are activity-based as opposed to inquiry-based, and the thematically-based, systematic learning of core subjects and core knowledge can sometimes force the integration of concepts. The materials specify the total amount of time suggested to work on each program (e.g., 40 minutes for two sessions of mathematics). Below, Louise recalls her attempts to explain distance education to friends and relatives overseas.

> *It's just such a foreign idea that your work would arrive at the door all set up for you to teach the children in a booklet… They just can't visualize that you get the papers and it tells you what to say to your child and what to make your child do and how to teach them a certain idea. I think because we've learnt all these concepts but we forget learning them. You forget that somebody sat in a classroom and said to you "two and two is four" and you don't remember that part of it and so you don't imagine somebody else having to teach. Your child comes home from school and they know that…* (Interview, September 6th, 2004)

If the home tutor is working with more than one child, the materials state that it may be helpful to have all children working on Mathematics or Language Across the Curriculum activities at the same time of the day. There is, however, very little guidance offered for planning learning interactions across grade levels, opportunities for peer tutoring or promoting the sharing of ideas within a schoolroom. The guidelines contained in the home tutor guides do not place emphasis on the student's interaction with others. Students are encouraged to become independent learners by becoming familiar with the bolded words and directions consistently used throughout the booklets so they can learn to read these and continue through their activities with less assistance from the home tutor. Each child's progress is recorded in terms of what can be completed or demonstrated independently.

In Year 4 there is no longer a home tutor guide accompanying the child's work materials. Here Cherie comments on this.

> *The papers are set out well and explained very well in Grades 1-3. Then in Grade 4 there's a big step because there is no Home Tutor Guide and they just give you the answers.* (Interview, October 4th, 2004)

Without a Home Tutor Guide, Louise reads the student materials themselves a day ahead. Below she describes what it is like to work this way. She worries that her child may not be doing the work correctly or completely when working independently for so long.

> *Year 4 is a bit different because they read it themselves so you have less control of what exactly they are learning and what they are taking in. You don't get a book. You get an answer book and you get a little book that tells you what the focus of each unit is. This day he should learn the meaning of adjectives and the being verb so I guess by the end of the day you say what does that mean? So that's a bit hard to adjust to. They are meant to read the lot. When it says home tutor help they are supposed to ask for you to come and do it with them. Otherwise they are meant to read through the instruction paper and do it. I make sure that I read the day ahead so I know what he is supposed to be doing and if I don't think that he has read something I can ask him without having to go through the paper and say what does this mean, I know that he has skipped something. It is a bit nerve wrecking just letting them go and not knowing whether they've picked up everything that they should be picking up. From here on out that is how they do it, reading it themselves.* (Interview, September 6th, 2004)

The GSDE materials also give specific direction for the contents and organization of the schoolroom space. Figure 6 illustrates guidelines (The State of Queensland, Department of Education, 1995, pp. 16 - 17) provided for the families in the first unit of work in Year 1. Identical information is provided in each Year level in the elementary program. In the GSDE documents, the home tutor is guided to talk to her child about the set-up of the work area, such as where the student will be working, how to keep materials tidy and organized, and any areas or spaces set aside for particular activities. Creating the classroom environment as directed is intended to provide the student with the opportunity to use needed resources for each of the kinds of learning activities.

Using the suggestions from the curriculum materials as criteria for interpreting the physical and temporal space, the schoolrooms created by the Louise, Kate and Cherie included a range of resources, materials and objects.

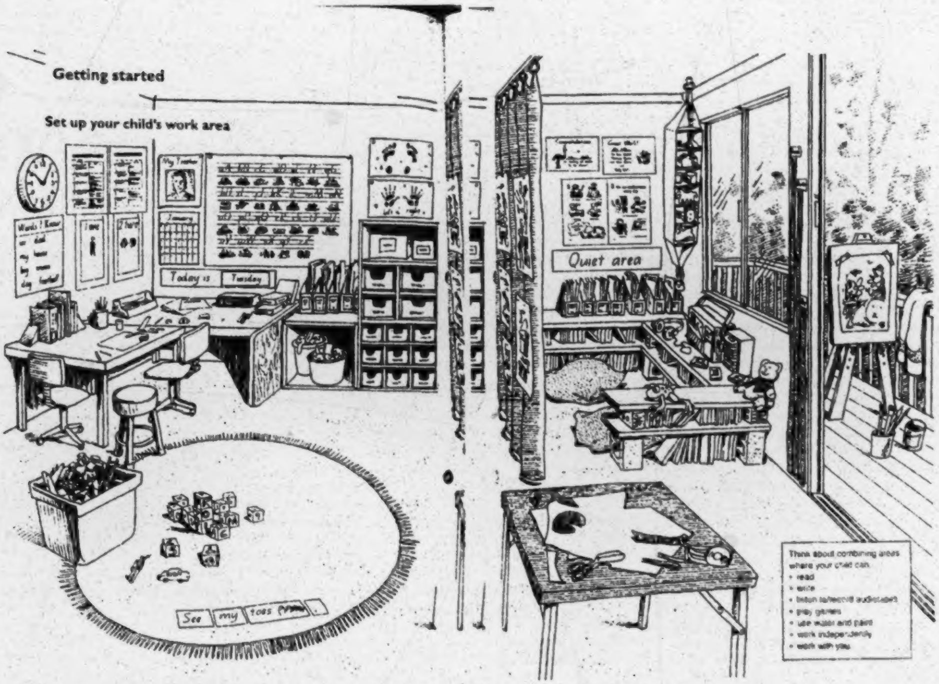

Getting started
Set up your child's work area
Words I Know
My Teacher
Today is
Tuesday
Quiet area
See my toys
Think about combining areas where your child can:
• read
• write
• listen to/record audiotapes
• play games
• use water and paint
• work independently
• work with you

Figure 6. Guidelines from curriculum: How to set up the "schoolroom" work area

The home tutors took care of the placement of objects and materials to promote aesthetic appeal. Different pieces of the students' completed school work were displayed and the instructional posters and charts were accessible to them.

Living the curriculum-as-plan

Although the three women were not always happy about the described or prescribed curriculum, they did not have the background to work well with it differently. What they did have, was a belief that their own educations had been successful experiences and a strong desire to support their children's education.

Louise, Kate and Cherie gave their own schooling experience a positive evaluation. One aspect of their educational experience we had the opportunity to discuss in depth was the physical space of their elementary classrooms. Much of Louise, Kate and Cherie's schooling experience occurred in individual desks in rows in classrooms in which the teachers had authority and control. I observed numerous occasions across the three schoolrooms when the home tutors would ask or tell their child/ren to be quiet, to sit with a particular posture or to position their hands and feet in a particular way. Certain permissible forms of behaviour were expected within these spaces during the "school day" when the curriculum work was being completed. This reminds me of Nespor's (1997, p. xvii) statement that "One of the key roles of schooling is to shape kids' bodies in particular ways and to attach these re-formed bodies to particular practices (such as reading and writing)." For Louise, Kate and Cherie, the organization of the classroom space involved consideration of controlling students and placing themselves in a way that would assist in managing the activity within the space.

Louise, Kate and Cherie did not have professional preparation for teaching. Within their own ways of understanding teaching and learning, however, they were adamant about standards for doing things properly. For example, after a VISE tutor had worked in her schoolroom, Cherie wrote the following journal entry expressing her consternation that her own standards and expectations were not being followed by the tutor.

> *I had a talk to them on Monday morning about being back and how things work. Like Adrian was to sound out words and things like that and I wasn't writing the sentence for him to copy. When it came to the story that Adrian did last week which was to be made into a book. When I had a look at it, [VISE tutor] had written three sentences for him. That really annoyed me because we had talked about this and she had done what I said not to do and words that I know he couldn't spell.* (Dialogue journal, September 8th, 2004)

Because of their isolation, Louise, Kate and Cherie also lacked access to many resources or experiences that might have informed their critique of the dated curriculum or their understanding of teaching, learning and development in ways other than what was stated or implied in the correspondence papers. In discussions about the curriculum materials, Louise, Kate and Cherie did not speak of the curriculum in terms of learning philosophies or teaching approaches. Each of them did, however, express concerns of one kind or another about the curriculum.

For example, Cherie recognizes the content of the curriculum is not always conducive to enjoyable learning as there is such a large amount of work to be completed in such a short period. In the interview excerpt below she expresses her appreciation of revision weeks.

> *If there are any sort of areas you can work on. Just see what they really do know and going back over it. I try to make it fun for them because the papers are pretty packed down and they sort of go from one to the other and I think that they need*

> *to have a slack week and do fun things. If they were in a normal school they would do fun things here and there. Whereas I have to try and make it so they do a few fun activities.* (Interview, September 13th, 2004)

In the following interview excerpt, Louise speaks of the spiral curriculum and some topics not being relevant to her children because of their experience in the place they live.

> *In some ways it is good that in Unit 1 they are all studying similar topics, but by the time you get to Year 4 or 5 you are tired of that topic. Thomas is doing a moon chart. He has done a moon chart every year, this is probably the third moon chart and that just gets a bit much because when they're living out here they are well aware of the signs of the weather. You're not going to teach them much having them write it down. They know that if they're freezing one day cause the winds are blowing or the clouds are coming it might rain. So in that way it gets really monotonous and you tend to drop things out because you think that you live that so they know that. When it's on something like we did camping this year and we don't camp like the conventional camper, we take our swag up the hills and so he has really enjoyed it and it's made him much more keen. Some of the units when it's things that they don't normally relate to they actually learn a fair bit. Like they're experiences that they wouldn't otherwise get. But some of them are a bit too basic for any kid living out on the land, but then I suppose not all Distance Ed kids are on the land.* (Interview, September 6th, 2004)

Kate feels that the curriculum writers have made an effort in some aspects to relate the content of the curriculum to their everyday experiences and knowledge, such as counting and multiplying objects Melissa is familiar with. However, Kate also recognises that many of the activities are closed-ended in terms of allowing Melissa choice and giving her the opportunity to bring in her knowledge and experiences.

> *I'm often saying, "You've just got to do it". Probably a bit of time comes into it too. If you had all the time in the world you could go off on heaps of tangents and explore whatever you wanted to explore… In these primary years the kids need to learn all these basics, they may say, "Why do I need to learn about phrases?" And for a child who is not going to be using writing a lot in later life they can't see the point of it, I still think that there are certain things that you have just got to learn for a basic education.* (Interview, October 12th, 2004)

With continued distance education experience from year to year, working from the same curriculum more than once, and receiving feedback as each year progressed, Louise, Kate and Cherie showed that they were increasingly familiar and confident with the curriculum materials. They felt comfortable in making certain decisions about leaving some activities out, usually activities like art or music, or adapting some of the activities to ensure their child/ren's understanding of a concept. However, even with this increased confidence and familiarity, the home tutors' actions and words remained focused on being able to:

1. See the work completed
2. Tell the school of distance education staff teacher the work is completed
3. Complete the curriculum work on time, and
4. Receive feedback from the school of distance education staff teacher

Each home tutor ensured that the "school day" outlined in the curriculum materials was completed, in particular, the activities in their child/ren's workbooks which were to be sent to the school of distance education staff teacher. For example, as Kate explains,

> *For some, it just offends their sense of aesthetics but for me, it would mess up the teaching plan. It might be the day when you learn all about adverbial phrases, or when some complicated division operation is introduced. I'm not about to deprive my child of that! You always want to send in a full book. A day in the middle of a full book just looks undone, doesn't look right. Everybody's got some sort of compulsion to finish the work that they have been set. I've learnt to relax a little bit and maybe not complete 15 units of work.* (Interview, October 12th, 2004)

In anticipation of "school days" to be missed in order to attend school organized events, such as clusters and sports skills days, the home tutors worked ahead so as not to miss or skip an entire day of school work. They used "day 10" or planned ahead to complete a little more than one day from the correspondence papers each day leading up to the event, or used evenings or weekends for extra work. For example, Louise shares,

> *I have the real want to have it done and have it done well. To make sure that it is done at the level that I know they can do it. I'm much more conscientious of getting everything done. I could leave the dishes for the whole day here but not very often would I leave school work from day to day…I'm very much into days 1 to 5 are done Monday to Friday following in sequence with the entire day finished on that day and generally that's the rule, you don't leave till that day is finished. Sometimes when you get a cluster interrupting, you've got to do extra. Both boys have to be on the same day and finishing each day's work, each day otherwise it just gets too hard to keep them going. They also rely on the other person doing just as much work as them. One can't be doing a whole day's work and another doing half a day, it just doesn't work.* (Interview, July 27th, 2004)

The home tutors were vigilant about the responsibility they felt to have their children complete the prescribed school work. They were trying hard to make sure that their children got a good education.

Home tutoring as "a chore" and doing a good job

Living and working on sheep and/or cattle properties in Western Queensland, each home tutor was also a co-worker/housewife/mother on her property. As part of the research each of the women took photographs of their daily lives and discussed these with me. In categorizing the photographs, the women differentiated between chores that needed to be done as opposed to activities they would choose to do out of interest or enjoyment. Louise provides examples of chores,

> *Clean the house, washing, cleaning, trying to keep the garden up and the men often need an extra hand putting lick out, running waters. I find the mail is what gets, all of a sudden you've got a huge pile of bills to pay, letters to answer, things like that. There always seems to be something, all the little things that need to be done.* (Interview, July 27th, 2004)

Each of the women sorted schoolroom photographs with other chores. This is the way Cherie expressed this.

> *The laundry is just a chore, a job that you have to do. In the kitchen, when you've got kids you have to get meals ready. You could put those ones into that group. Happy times and sad ones. There are no sad ones in here at the moment. The school could come into the chore, something that they have to do. Group them into family quality time, my own time, own bit of space. Things that you have to do or things that you do enjoy, being outside in the garden. Putting the kids to bed is not really a hassle, some night you just want them to go to sleep and other times it is quite a nice time and read them a story and give them a kiss. It's a peaceful time, family time. It's a nice time as well you get to talk to each child as you put them to bed, they just drag on, cause they're just not ready to go to sleep.*
> (Interview, November 9th, 2004)

The following interview excerpts from the three women express views of home tutoring as something that needs to be done, something that one accepts, but something that keeps one from other activities of greater interest.

> *Until you get to after school its pretty well, the same everyday. And that depends on what* ***needs to be done*** *as opposed to what you'd* ***like to do****.*
> (Louise, Interview, October 18th 2004)

> *One [child] was good, it was something new and a bit of a challenge, but now the saying is "If I wanted to be a teacher I would've been a teacher". I think I've learnt to come to accept it…it's a big part of your day now. The first [child] was challenging and something new.*
> (Cherie, Interview, September 13th 2004)

> *I guess I'm getting impatient thinking, my life is going by. And trying to participate in it before I really should be, like participate in the other part to my life I mean. I really need to say "I've got two and a half years to go and give it my best shot," then it'll be done…I'm a person who loves learning, don't know about loves teaching!*
> (Kate, Interview, August 2nd 2004)

The "household work" and the "property work" completed by the women involved keeping up to schedules, doing particular tasks on time, seeing tangible results, and being able to evaluate the work's results. Unlike most chores in their daily lives, the women's work in the schoolrooms could not be easily evaluated. Without professional backgrounds in teaching, how would they know if they were doing a good job? Routines, deadlines, and the tangible product of completed workbooks became the daily criteria for their evaluation of their work in the schoolroom.

The women did have other occasions to appreciate their successful teaching. For example, they witnessed their children spontaneously reading or counting outside of the schoolroom, their children received awards, and their children became more willing to stay at clusters without their mothers remaining with them. On a daily basis, however, all that they largely had to go by was the completion of the prescribed activities for the day. As the following interview excerpt from Cherie reveals, even positive feedback from distance education staff sometimes failed to deliver satisfying or persuasive validation.

> *...like on Nathan's feedback sheet and [teacher] had said it was a really well done unit. So then I start thinking am I doing a proper job or not. Should I be doing more with him. Like Jeremy said I read too much into these things. I just love to worry about things. Must not have too much else to do. I'm sure someone would have said something if Nathan was behind or struggling or if I wasn't doing a good job.* (Dialogue journal, August 21st, 2004)

Being "mother-teachers"

As highlighted in the following statements by Lawrence Lightfoot (2003, p. 189), questions have been raised about what happens when teachers become mothers.

> This paradox--of separating and merging the roles of mother and teacher--has been at the centre of a long conversation among educators and social scientists who have argued over whether these two primary women's roles should be distinct or overlapping, and whether the configuration of roles might support or undermine the learning and development of children.

In my research, I am in fact working with the reverse situation of which Lawrence Lightfoot writes. In my study of the school learning places that evolve when mothers are the home tutors in the schoolrooms I have had the opportunity to witness what can happen when women are mothers first and then become their children's teachers. To better appreciate their ways of being teachers, I paid attention to the ways in which they are mothers. This sub-section is intended to offer a sense of the way they live out their mothering roles.

Louise, Kate and Cherie spend time with their children in a multitude of contexts – in the house, in the sheep and cattle yards, out in locations within the wider property boundaries, in the local town/s at community, sporting and school-related events. Depending on the place and the activity, the mothers assumed a many diverse roles in relation to their children. While visiting with friends, watching or participating with their children in physical activity, doing tasks together, or sharing a meal, Louise, Kate and Cherie took roles such as "protector," "friend," "coach," "cheerleader," "judge," "pastor," "encourager," "teacher," and "police person" in relation with their children.

For example, when in the kitchen preparing meals, Louise encourages Thomas and Timothy to make the garlic butter, to cut up vegetables or mix the pudding for dessert. She assists the two brothers in the afternoons with their dramatic play by sewing sword holders out of spare material. She takes the time to coach Thomas in riding his horse skilfully for the upcoming gymkhana day of competition. She judges Thomas and Timothy's level of responsibility and need for supervision. For example, being older, Thomas is allowed to ride the motorbike and use his knife by himself. However, Louise remains protective of him, as highlighted in an entry of her dialogue journal,

> *Thomas is still having trouble with one of the boys on his team being bossy and know it all. The problem is it is one of his friends and I am not sure if I should tell his mother or hope the kids straighten him out. Maybe I will have a word with the*

> *coach at the next game and he can have a general discussion about good sportsmanship.* (July 25th, 2004)

Kate enjoys interaction with others - in person, on the phone, or via email. She is a good listener and encourages conversations with Melissa about a variety of topics. She becomes very engaged in discussions with her daughter. Below, Kate tells of a time when Melissa asked her if a visiting teacher at minischool comes for PE or RE (physical education or religious education).

> *I said that it was RE and stood for Religious Education and I asked what Mr C. spoke about and she said, "Mr C. said that God created the world in six days and I don't think it's right". So we had a big talk about evolutionary theory and whether you take things literally, whether it might mean just a creation story and not just six literal days and she seemed to participate in that conversation really easily with me. We talked about a lot of stuff, how they found animal fossils and they can see how they have changed over time and it couldn't have happened in a day. She really got into that discussion with me. I think that Melissa does surprise me with her understanding of things quite a bit.* (Interview, August 30th, 2004)

Melissa is encouraged by Kate to explore the materials on the veranda, including clay and paints. Kate also supports Melissa's enjoyment of art through purchasing her art-related projects to do at her own leisure. Kate serves as judge when she attends swimming practice to time-keep for the club participants and as coach for Melissa as she records her daughter's times in a personal book they later review.

Cherie enjoys being a friend with her children and spending time with them doing the things they all enjoy. Cherie's dialogue journal highlights a selection of these times,

> *Well what a great family day, it's so nice when we have these sorts of days together. We had a day in the garden digging up the fruit trees, fertilizer, and picking all the last of the mandarins. We had Nathan and Adrian up in the top of the tree on top of the tractor getting the mandarins. The kids enjoy days like this too when we are all together. Kyle and Paul are helpful sometimes putting on the fertilizer handfuls at a time and not spreading it out. This is how they learn.*

> *We spend a lot of time [in the house garden too]...We sit out here a lot, mainly in summer and have tea; it's so nice and cooler out there in summer. Even smokos we have out there. It's like a family gathering place, our special place. We call it the [Property name] Beer Garden, but it's a relaxing place for us where we sit and talk, we do a lot of talking out there. If we're sitting out there one of the kids will come and sit and we'll talk. It's a special little place for us that we like.* (August 31st, 2004)

Cherie also encourages her children to be independent and provides opportunities for them to learn the skills associated with activities they are interested in, or need to learn out of necessity, by hands-on, trial and error. Below, Cherie recalls feeling challenged to question the space she provides for her children's independence.

> *Over the week [the VISE tutors] had told us that we were pretty casual with our kids. At first I didn't know how to really take this. Of course the wrong way at first! It was getting the better of me and after words with Jeremy, I had to go and talk to her what she meant by this. She said that at first she was worried about what our kids could do [driving, riding motorbikes, playing outside without me outside with them] then she said that may be they should have been a bit like us and relaxed about raising their kids. I'm still not sure how to take it. I have noticed that with the last two of our kids that they are further advanced than Nathan and Adrian ever were - in the climbing, playing etc. Maybe we are a bit more relaxed with them as well. I also do think that it is good for them that they have to think for themselves, like Paul can't open the gate but he can climb the fence to get out.* (Dialogue journal, August 21st, 2004)

Louise, Kate and Cherie all enjoy playing with their children, laughing and joking with their children, having conversations with them about current affairs or closer-to-home issues, and relaxing with them. They independently observed, judged and encouraged their children's competence in many activities. In the school learning places, these multiple dimensions of their mother-child relationship were markedly less evident in their home tutor - student relationships. As reflected in the examples recounted below, however, their inclination to extend themselves to support their children's growth and development in their daily lives outside of the schoolrooms was clearly evident.

Louise, for example, even in times of feeling unwell, ensured that the boys had the opportunity to socialize with other children in the community and to also practice their skills and knowledge in activities of interest. She shared the following in her dialogue journal.

> *What a weekend. Into [town] yesterday for the gymkhana. Thomas and I had a good trip in, no fighting. We all arrived at the show grounds about the same time. Saddled up and got into competition. It was a good day. Though my head started to go just at the end of the horse events but the boys wanted to watch bronco branding so we stayed on. Daniel took the horses home. The boys had fun in the footraces and we hit the road. By the time we got to the turn off I was finding it hard to drive but had no option so kept going. Got home and went to bed. Thomas cooked eggs for everyone. He can be so helpful if he wants. Usually when not asked.*
>
> *Woke up Sunday feeling much better but not 100%. If I had had to drive to [town] for football we wouldn't have gone. If it hadn't been the last game of the season I wouldn't have gone. But I went. Thomas had a really good game. It is so good to see his confidence so improved. Timothy had his worst game but still got two tries. I wasn't well enough for us to stay in and everybody was very tired so we headed home…* (August 15th, 2004)

During the data collection period, Kate was trying to fulfil all of her roles to the best of her ability and satisfaction and described herself as an elastic band, "*Stretching, and fraying at the ends?! Liable to snap at any moment*!" (Dialogue journal, July 29th, 2004). While Kate was helping to organize a conference, meet the demands of her professional work and also fulfil her school of distance education volunteer executive position duties, Melissa was learning chess as an extra-curricular on-air activity. The following entry from Kate's dialogue journal highlights her wonderings about her level of involvement in chess, a newly-added activity in their educational lives,

> *I think Melissa knew most of what [teacher] was saying about moving pawns, but is still looking forward to more lessons. I wonder how she practices? Should we (me) be learning chess too, to give her a game? I didn't like it a lot when my Dad*

> *taught me the year I was home before university so that's a prospect I don't really relish.* (Dialogue journal, July 29th, 2004)

As mothers, each of the women felt responsible for their children's growth and development. Louise conceives her role as, "*[being] there when they need you and make sure they learn what they need to know to get on in the world and provide them with what you can to make them good citizens*" (Interview, October 12th, 2004). Kate sees herself as a role model in her children's lives, someone that her children can learn from. Below, Cherie expresses the significance of her two roles as mother and educator in her children's lives,

> *If they fail it's my fault! That's how you look at it some days – why haven't they learnt that? It's my fault. It's a pretty big part because being their teacher as well as their mum you look at it like "why don't they know that? It's my fault they're not doing that.*" (Interview, September 13th, 2004)

The three women's "just get it done" approach to being home tutors in the schoolrooms may have been a consequence of their lack of knowledge and interest related to teaching, and/or their expectations for how to "do a good job of chores," and/or, as Cherie reveals below, the constant press of being with one's children. When looking at the photographs she had taken of her everyday life, Cherie commented,

> *Sometimes I would like to give these school ones to my sister to make them realise how easy they have it…I just don't think that they understand what it is like to have their kids seven days a week, 24 hours a day, all the time. They get a break from their kids. But then I think that we are a closer-knit family than what they would be.* (Interview, November 9th, 2004)

When Cherie was relieved from the schoolroom for a time by the VISE tutor, she wrote the following reflections in her dialogue journal. She notes that she doesn't have to spend the afternoons preparing for the next day's school work and she doesn't have to worry about how well the children are doing the work.

> *I have been just enjoying my time out of the schoolroom. It's great just to be a mum to the kids again and not have to hassle them to do this and hurry up and do this. For some reason mothers as home tutors seem to expect more from their kids. I'm guilty of that. Also as the home tutor and mother you seem to have more added pressures of school and household duties and any thing else that comes that way. In the last 3 weeks I haven't had the worries of, "are they doing this neatly?" or "have I got this ready for tomorrow?" In the afternoons I'm not preparing work I'm doing something for myself or with the kids I'm actually just a mum whose kids have come home from school and there is no bad feelings because we had a bad day…I just ask, "how did you go with this and have you done that." Mind you it was a bit hard to get out of the routine at first…I think I actually feel happy in myself not having that extra pressure on me.*
> (Dialogue journal, August 21st, 2004)

In these comments, Cherie also speculated that mothers as home tutors expect more from their children which can exacerbate the sense of pressure they feel in that role.

The children's experience of their "mother-teachers"

As the children and I looked at the photographs they had taken of the various places of their daily lives, we discussed their views on "mum" in different places. The children described the places where they had the most fun with their mothers and the places where they didn't enjoy being with them. In their own ways, the children related how their mothers behaved in different places, including the schoolroom. Timothy, for example, said,

> *My mum is the most fun in the yard on the front lawn playing touch football and having water fights. She lies and looks at the stars on a Saturday night with us. Last Saturday night we saw an aeroplane and shooting stars. She is fun in this place.* (Interview, October 17th, 2004)

Timothy also enjoys swimming in the dam with his family and enjoys being pushed up in the air by Louise so he can dive into the water. Like his brother, Thomas also perceives Louise as being the most fun in the yard playing touch football. He also enjoys spending time with his mother walking around a rock structure near their home and has a favourite memory of camping with Louise in the hills on their property. The boys speak positively of having their mother teaching them in the schoolroom. Not only is Louise fun but they also understand that the duration of the school day and the amount of school work with their mother is less than with VISE tutors or with a teacher in a regular primary school.

Nathan appreciates the quieter one-on-one time he has with Cherie, such as when they are under the tree in the front garden sitting together in the shade. He can tell his mother is happy there too and acts in a fun way. He and Adrian both enjoy going in the pool and swimming with Cherie. Adrian likes it when Cherie lifts him up so he can dive into the pool. He also appreciates the quieter one-on-one time with Cherie in the kitchen where he sometimes helps her with the cooking.

Melissa likes to go to town with Kate. When asked to tell about this town experience further, Melissa said, "*Usually we go to swim camp and she'd tell me that 'That was really good' and I'd say 'No it wasn't.' She encourages me and that's good*" (Interview, October 11th, 2004). Melissa also enjoys spending time with her mother walking down to the river and recalled a time measuring the floodwater with sticks and checking the water level the following day.

None of the children had taken a photograph of the schoolroom; however, they all described their "mum" as being different there—different from the way she was in other places. Nathan had difficulty in articulating the difference but just knew she was different in the garden than in the schoolroom. Adrian expressed the difference this way: "*She acts happy in the garden; she acts sad in the schoolroom*" (Interview, October 17th, 2004). Thomas stated that Louise acted differently in the schoolroom because, "*She wants us to do the school work until it is done*" (Interview, October 17th, 2004). Melissa talked about her mother's anger in the schoolroom and believes she becomes frustrated because it takes longer for Melissa to understand concepts or to complete work in the right way: "*She gets angry at me for spelling cause she is a really good speller and I'm a really bad speller. She wants me to be good but I'm not*" (Interview, October 11th, 2004).

As discussed in Chapter 9, all the children described "school" as a place they didn't like but they all also appreciated having their mothers as their teachers and preferred to work with them rather than having VISE tutors. For both the children and the home tutors, the experience of everyday life in the schoolrooms--the school learning places that were evolving—was an aversive one.

The mothers' perceptions of themselves in the schoolroom

Each of the women believed that their identities did not change when they were in their schoolrooms. They viewed themselves as their children's mothers and the difference in their role was not that of becoming a "teacher" utilising particular skills, knowledge and abilities, but a difference in their attitude to the task. For example, Louise believes she is the same person in the schoolroom as she is in other places with her children except her attitude is focused on completing the curriculum work.

> *…obviously in the schoolroom it is much less about having fun. I'm much more task orientated. When I'm in the schoolroom it is get in and get it done. Although I'm trying to get a bit more fun in. There's no difference between mum and teacher other than I'm more task orientated in the schoolroom. The leniency isn't what it is in the house. Otherwise no difference…It's obviously a place of task, not somewhere where we muck around. On a good day I really like it there cause it's nice to see the boys learning and growing and doing their work well. To see where they've come, considering where they started. When they are working well we do tend to have some fun.* (Interview, October 18th, 2004)

Kate explained that she leaves one aspect of herself outside of the school learning place and puts emphasis on another,

> *The party aspect of me doesn't go down to the schoolroom but then it probably doesn't need to everyday. I guess that I'm somebody who likes learning and thinks that it's a good thing to do. So I guess that I'm showing that application to a task.* (Interview, October 12th, 2004)

When looking at photographs she had taken of herself in the schoolroom, Kate felt she did not look very excited by what she was doing.

> *The schoolroom doesn't look like a very exciting atmosphere. It makes me feel a bit tired... It makes me feel that it's no wonder that Melissa doesn't enjoy her days there sometimes. I'm giving off a feeling of something that I've got to get through.* (Interview, October 12th, 2004)

For Cherie, distinguishing between mother and educator is about the expectation she has for her children's behaviour and her own attitude to the curriculum work.

> *It probably does change a bit when we get to the schoolroom. Cause they know that there is no mucking around. Whereas at breakfast time you can joke a bit more, you're not as serious, you've got to get it done. Once we get into the schoolroom we do click into that monster a little bit. Yes this is it we have to get it done, no mucking around. Cause to the kids you're all right out here and then why are we so serious in here? You're still mum. But I have made a point that it's my attitude that goes to school. If I've had a bad morning then that will affect the kids and we just know that it is going to be a bad day. I try to go to school positive so that I like then they will like it.* (Interview, November 9th, 2004)

The three women viewed the school curriculum work as a task to be completed. No "mucking around" suggests completion of the task is to be undertaken seriously. While the women saw their identity as parent and educator as not different, one could argue that the tasks, roles and responsibilities required of each were quite different. One could also argue that the multiple parent roles they demonstrated so spontaneously and adeptly outside of the classroom, e.g., "encourager," "coach," "playmate," etc. were not as evident in the schoolrooms.

Table 1

Examples of the Use of the Analytic Framework for the Interpretive Account: "The 'How' and 'Why' of the School Learning Place Experience"

Choosing distance education and home tutoring **Home tutor identities (values and motivations)** Valuing lifestyle afforded on their properties. Caring for their children and wanting them to have the lifestyle possible on a property. **Valuing family life and wanting the family to stay together (rather than sending kids to town for school)** Valuing education for their children and believing it would support their life chances. **Resources** Financial costs of hiring a governess meant mothers had to be the home tutors.
The distance education materials **Resources** The distance education materials provide an activity-based curriculum. The materials are very prescriptive. For example, they outline the home tutor and student's tasks, roles and responsibilities, specify the total amount of time suggested to work on each program, and give specific direction for the contents and organization of the schoolroom space.
Living the curriculum-as-plan **Home tutor identities (ways of seeing and acting developed in their own childhood school experience)** Much of Louise, Kate and Cherie's schooling experience occurred in individual desks in rows in classrooms in which the teachers had authority and control. Louise, Kate and Cherie gave their own schooling experience a positive evaluation. **Rules and routines** I observed numerous occasions across the three schoolrooms when the home tutors would ask or tell their child/ren to be quiet, to sit with a particular posture or to position their hands and feet in a particular way. For Louise, Kate and Cherie, the organization of the classroom space involved consideration of controlling students and placing themselves in a way that would assist in managing the activity within the space.

(table continues)

Home tutor identities
Louise, Kate and Cherie did not have professional preparation for teaching but were motivated to provide their children with a good education.

Rules and routines
Within their own ways of understanding teaching and learning, however, they were adamant about standards for doing things properly. There was consternation if VISE tutors did not also do things properly.
They were also adamant about doing things completely. In anticipation of "school days" to be missed in order to attend school organized events, such as clusters and sports skills days, the home tutors worked ahead so as not to miss or skip an entire day of school work.

Available relationships
Because of their isolation, Louise, Kate and Cherie lacked access to many resources, experiences, or people that might have informed their critique of the dated curriculum or their understanding of teaching, learning and development in ways other than what was stated or implied in the correspondence papers.

Resources
Some topics in the distance education materials were not relevant to the children because of their experience in the places where they live.

Rules and routines
Each home tutor ensured that the "school day" outlined in the curriculum materials was completed, and in particular, the activities in their child/ren's workbooks which were to be sent to the school of distance education staff teacher.

Home tutoring as "a chore" and doing a good job

The resulting experience of everyday life in the schoolroom for home tutors
The three women express views of home tutoring as something that needs to be done, something that one accepts, but something that keeps one from other activities of greater interest.

Home tutor identities (ways of seeing and acting)
The "household work" and the "property work" completed by the women involved keeping up to schedules, doing particular tasks on time, seeing tangible results, and being able to evaluate the work's results. Unlike most chores in their daily lives, the women's work in the schoolrooms could not be easily evaluated. Without professional backgrounds in teaching, how would they know if they were doing a good job?

(table continues)

The resulting experience of everyday life in the schoolroom for home tutors
Routines, deadlines, and the tangible product of completed workbooks became the daily criteria for their evaluation of their work in the schoolroom.

Being "mother-teachers"

Home tutor identities (roles, motivations)
Louise, Kate and Cherie all enjoy playing with their children, laughing and joking with their children, having conversations with them about current affairs or closer-to-home issues, and relaxing with them. They independently observed, judged and encouraged their children's competence in many activities.

Available relationships in the schoolrooms
In the schoolrooms, these multiple dimensions of their mother-child relationship were markedly less evident in their home tutor - student relationships.

The resulting experience of everyday life in the schoolroom for home tutors
The three women's "just get it done" approach to being home tutors in the schoolrooms may have been a consequence of their lack of knowledge and interest related to teaching, and/or their expectations for how to "do a good job of chores," and/or, as at least one home tutor expressed, the constant press of being with one's children. One of the home tutors also stated that mothers as home tutors expect more from their children which can exacerbate the sense of pressure they feel in that role.

The children's experience of their "mother-teachers"

Available relationships
Each of the children indicated that their mothers were different to be with in the schoolroom—less happy, sad, "wants us to do the school work until it is done", or even angry. The children, nonetheless, appreciated having their mothers as their teachers and preferred to work with them rather than having VISE tutors.

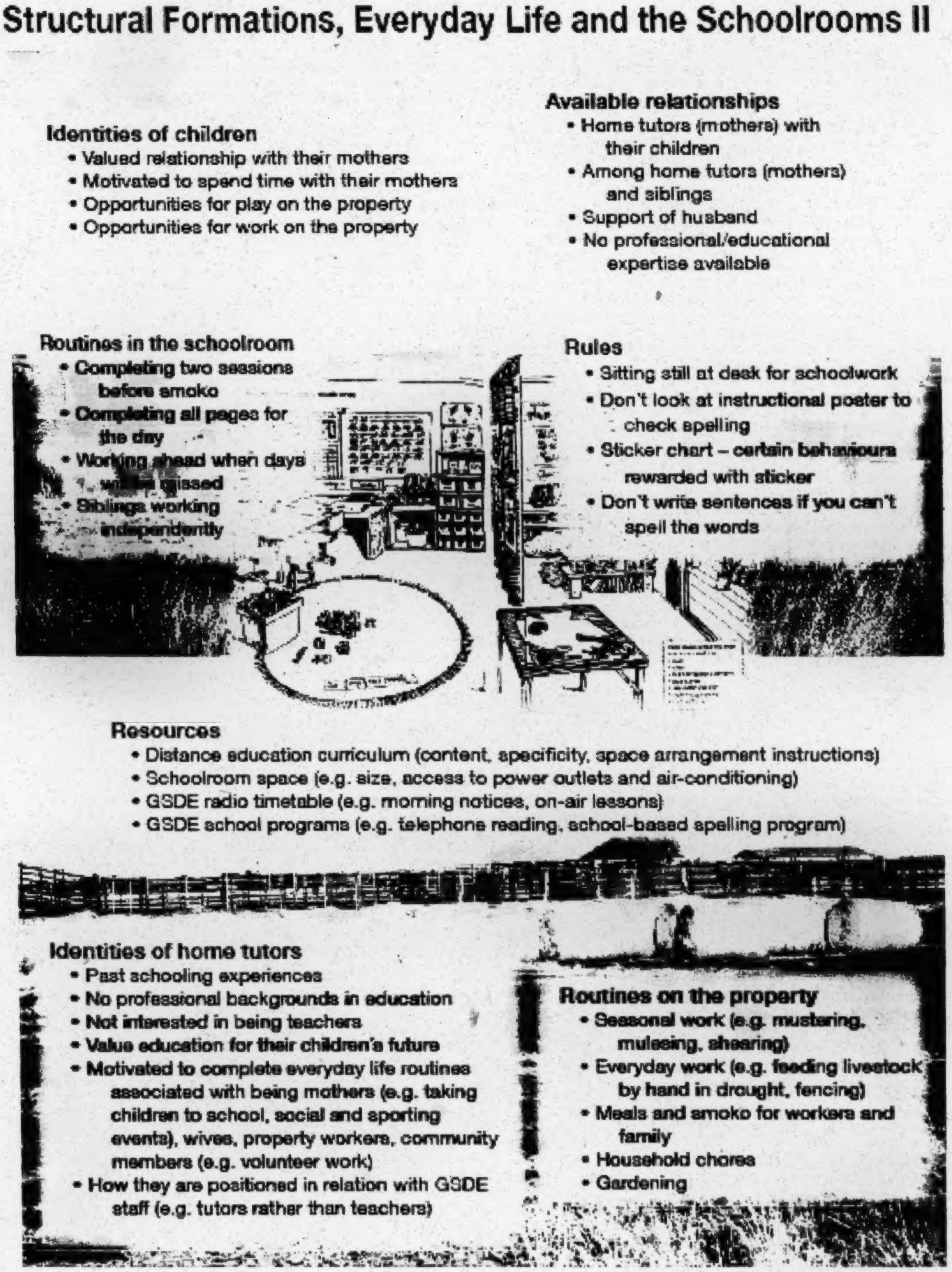
The resulting experience of everyday life in the schoolroom for children
The children described "school" as a place they didn't like.

The mothers' perceptions of themselves in the schoolroom

Home tutor identities (ways of seeing and acting in the schoolroom)
The three women viewed the school curriculum work as a task to be completed. No "mucking around" suggests completion of the task is to be undertaken seriously. The multiple parent roles they demonstrated so spontaneously and adeptly outside of the classroom, e.g., "encourager," "coach," "playmate," etc. were not as evident in the schoolrooms.

Discussion

The interpretive accounts and analyses that have been presented in Chapters 5 through 10 result from my efforts to make sense of how and why the school learning places--everyday life in the schoolrooms--were evolving in the ways they were. I endeavoured to understand what everyday life in the schoolrooms was like for home tutors and children, why it was like that, how it came to be that way, and what it meant for home tutors and the children to experience it in those ways. I used *place* as a central idea and asked "how place is at work, ingredient in, or part of the on-going dynamic of" (Ellis, In press) the distance education experience for the home tutors and children. Eyles' (1989) ideas about the relationships among the structural formations of place, everyday life, and identity together with Ashcroft's (2001) ideas about the significance of the identities inhabitants bring with them to a place, provided a theoretical framework for the inquiry. The resources provided by the Gorman School of Distance Education were very significant as a structural formation constraining everyday life in the schoolrooms. The identities of the home tutors also strongly influenced the way everyday life evolved in the schoolrooms. Figure 7, which elaborates Figure 1 in Chapter 4, highlights examples of some of the findings or categories of findings related to the conceptual framework for *place*. Although the findings presented in this figure are not exhaustive, this visual emphasizes that the *place* concepts do have details and provides an opportunity to hold many of the details all in play simultaneously for consideration and reflection.



Structural Formations, Everyday Life and the Schoolrooms II

Identities of children
- Valued relationship with their mothers
- Motivated to spend time with their mothers
- Opportunities for play on the property
- Opportunities for work on the property

Available relationships
- Home tutors (mothers) with their children
- Among home tutors (mothers) and siblings
- Support of husband
- No professional/educational expertise available

Routines in the schoolroom
- Completing two sessions before smoko
- Completing all pages for the day
- Working ahead when days will be missed
- Siblings working independently

Rules
- Sitting still at desk for schoolwork
- Don't look at instructional poster to check spelling
- Sticker chart – certain behaviours rewarded with sticker
- Don't write sentences if you can't spell the words

Resources
- Distance education curriculum (content, specificity, space arrangement instructions)
- Schoolroom space (e.g. size, access to power outlets and air-conditioning)
- GSDE radio timetable (e.g. morning notices, on-air lessons)
- GSDE school programs (e.g. telephone reading, school-based spelling program)

Identities of home tutors
- Past schooling experiences
- No professional backgrounds in education
- Not interested in being teachers
- Value education for their children's future
- Motivated to complete everyday life routines associated with being mothers (e.g. taking children to school, social and sporting events), wives, property workers, community members (e.g. volunteer work)
- How they are positioned in relation with GSDE staff (e.g. tutors rather than teachers)

Routines on the property
- Seasonal work (e.g. mustering, mulesing, shearing)
- Everyday work (e.g. feeding livestock by hand in drought, fencing)
- Meals and smoko for workers and family
- Household chores
- Gardening

Figure 7. Structural formations, everyday life and the schoolrooms II

I learned that for both home tutors and children, positive feelings were not associated with everyday life in the schoolrooms. The children liked being with their mothers and preferred them to VISE tutors, but found their mothers to be sad, less fun, or unhappy with their performance when in the schoolroom. There were also many school learning activities the children didn't like doing.

The mothers experienced the home tutor activities as something that they "had to do." They were focused on ensuring that the children completed the day's work in the booklets that would later be sent to distance education staff. They rarely modified or adapted lessons or activities, and they followed their own commonsense rules for how children learn to read and write. Even with two children working on language arts at the same time, the children worked independently. Without professional backgrounds in teaching or an interest in teaching, getting their children through the pages of the booklets on schedule became a chore much like many other household and property chores that simply had to be done. This chore became even less interesting the second time around when repeating units a year or two later with a younger child.

Unlike property or household chores, however, home-tutoring activities didn't yield tangible proof that one had done a good job. The home tutors longed to know whether their children were at the right level or whether they should push them harder. Completed pages in the booklets of the distance education materials were the only tangible result they could see for their efforts on a daily basis. Doing a good job was important to them, however. They believed that good educations would help their children's future lives. They also were in the habit of doing a good job of all tasks on their properties and in their homes. The home tutors valued both family life and the lifestyles afforded to families by living on the properties they had. Home schooling became a forced choice because of these values. Once in the roles of home tutors, the mothers worked within their means and ways of understanding to do a good job as teachers for their children.

The distance education materials were a key resource for the schoolrooms. The mothers' memories of their own school experience resonated with and supported the "follow directions" approach offered by the distance education materials. Everyday life on the properties meant that time was a limited resource. The home tutors felt compelled to contain the time in the schoolrooms to very specific and tight time frames. This made the time and activities in the schoolrooms feel very pressured and made routines and schedules in the schoolroom very important. Experiencing the home tutoring work in this way—as pushing children through the completion of all of the prescribed daily tasks on schedule—was very stressful. Even finding time to prepare for daily tasks in the schoolroom was stressful given that the home tutors had multiple roles and responsibilities as mothers, wives, property workers, and community members. One of them also did journalism work professionally. So being home tutors was tiring and stressful and didn't even offer the gratification of being able to know for sure that this form of education was working well enough.

The children had many places and activities they enjoyed within and outside of the families' properties. These places supported the development of self-identity both by affording opportunities for them to try out predefined roles in conventional settings and by offering unprogrammed space (Chawla, 1992). They learned to muster, build fences, clean ponds, work in the garden, cook, ride horses, build motorbikes, and more with encouraging attention and useful feedback from their parents. In their own unprogrammed space on the properties they built private retreats, jumps for their bikes, and a variety of temporary structures for use in their imaginative play. The places of their everyday lives outside of the schoolrooms supported meaningful relationships and opportunities for creative expression and exploration. The children experienced and enjoyed their mothers in many roles and moods outside of the schoolroom. The mothers acknowledged that they did not take some of these more enjoyable aspects of themselves into the schoolroom. The mothers' more limited and less enjoyable forms of interaction with their children in the schoolrooms, together with the routined approach to following the distance education materials meant that the school learning places that evolved lacked aspects of children's favourite places—opportunities for social affiliation, creative expression and exploration (Chawla, 1992) or social support, autonomy, and positive feelings (Langhout, 2003).

This summary has underscored the way the schoolrooms as places were parts of the larger place of the families' properties. The mothers' educational biographies and the families' everyday lives on their properties circumscribed the ways everyday life evolved in the schoolrooms. The distance education materials, while providing a resource for home tutors, failed to rescue school learning activities from becoming simply a chore for both students and home tutors.

CHAPTER 11

CLOSING REFLECTIONS AND WONDERINGS

I began this inquiry guided by the question, how do home tutors and students create and experience a "school learning place" for the distance education program? As outlined in Chapter 1, I understood *place* as referring to the everyday life that evolves in a space. I also understood resources, rules, routines, relationships, and identities of inhabitants as structural formations constraining the everyday life that is possible. I tried to learn the nature and significance of home tutors' and children's experience in the "school learning places" that evolved in their schoolrooms. I also endeavoured to learn the meaning of the school learning places in the larger contexts of the places of the families' everyday lives. What is home schooling like as a component of living and working on sheep or cattle properties (ranches or stations), and as but one part of the families' everyday lives?

Through this inquiry I intended to advance my understanding of the families' experiences of distance education. My experience as a teacher at the Gorman School of Distance Education had prompted my "concernful engagement" (Ellis, 1998) with the research question and contributed to my related pre-conceptions. The "forward arc" of the hermeneutic circle represents my preliminary understandings of what kind of phenomena distance education is. Much like Louise, quoted below, I too wondered how things might be better in distance education.

> *...insanity...doing the same thing over and over again expecting a different result. Doesn't that sound like our schoolroom? How do we change what we do, this is the question, and would the result be better?*
> (Dialogue journal, August 23, 2004*)*

In the first section of this chapter I attempt to offer a window into both my pre-understandings related to the research topic and the messiness or tensions of the research conducted. These reflections appear to introduce "new data" from the study. I include this material at this point however as it is the relevant context for situating the culminating reflections presented in the second section of this chapter. In the "forward arc" of the hermeneutic circle, the projective character of my understanding caused me to feel frustrated because I was making sense of what I was seeing, hearing, feeling and experiencing using previous knowledge, beliefs and values -- my "forestructure". The culminating reflections are my current composition of the transformations in my understandings achieved in this research. In the "backward arc" of the hermeneutic circle, the movement of return, I gained an increased appreciation of what my forestructure involved, and where it might best be changed. I became increasingly humbled as my ability to take different perspectives grew. Now as I present my closing reflections for this research, I am mindful that, as Jardine (1998, p. 49) states, "the process of interpretation is not the simple accumulation of new objective information. It is, rather, the transformation of self-understanding." In the third section of this chapter I discuss the evaluation of this research.

Reflections on the research process

> *A second visit to the Michaelson's, my fourth in all. The journey seemed shorter, my body felt less tense, no need to follow the map and check the kilometres driven since the last turn off, the dirt road less covered by bull dust and lone boulders. I began this research grimacing and holding my breath at the sight of kangaroo road kill. 1600 kilometres later, my only reaction is to swerve left or right to avoid my car tyres being slashed by the sharpness of their bones.*

> *Thomas directed me to park my car near the shed as he and Timothy came racing out to greet me. The two boys are demanding, physically and emotionally, yet I feel this will be an enjoyable two days with the likable students, but long. Daniel and Louise were watching the football so I joined them while waiting for my headache to subside. A headache caused by my own actions – not wanting to replenish my body of fluids for fear of needing to release them during the long distance between towns.*
> (Green, field notes, August 15th, 2004)

During the five months of data collection, I experienced many physical tensions. Headaches from dehydration and extended periods of concentrated driving; torn tendons from playing a variety or sports and unfamiliar activities with the children; a sore backside from riding on the rear of motorbikes and sitting for extended periods of concentrated observing. Yet, the most prominent and continual tensions I experienced resulted from my dual role as teacher and researcher in both the contexts of the families' homes and at the school of distance education.

> *After the boys were in bed, William and Jenny (VISE tutors) were having a cup of tea and William raised the topic of what has been happening in the schoolroom. They had one really good second week and the past week, the third, was terrible for them. I sensed a feeling of despair or hopelessness in William. It seems like he has tried so many strategies to motivate Thomas – all extrinsic – star charts, reading "Rin Tin Tin." The rewards motivate for a short period of time.*
>
> *William and Jenny looked to me for advice but I felt they had tried everything I would have in my own classroom. But is that appropriate? How is the classroom different to the schoolroom? What about the intrinsic love and joy of learning? What ways can we help to instil these attitudes in a student who has such dislike for learning in a schoolroom which follows such a rigid curriculum? Is it a dislike, though, or a reaction to fear, or non-confidence?*
>
> *Louise joins our conversation and interjects with examples of strategies she has used. Some of these are new ideas for William, and he speaks of trying them. I recall three years earlier when Thomas was a student in my Grade 1 class. There were many occasions when I thought I understood Thomas, or perhaps it would be more accurate to state that we had found a way to coerce Thomas to do the schoolwork.*

> *William describes tomorrow as going to be "hell on wheels". Jenny stresses the need to present the work in a way which draws upon both the boys' interests. Louise suggests that a visitor means time to knuckle down. I remind William and Jenny to please let me know if my presence is intrusive or affecting the happenings in the schoolroom negatively.*
>
> *Ha! Slipping back into researcher role is easy at this point. I am observing, my role is not to give suggestions or ideas. The truth is, I do not feel I have many suggestions or new ideas. What would I 'do' with a 'Thomas' in my own classroom? The curriculum would be different and project work would allow for the students to follow their interest in concrete explorations. The next day I suggested some ideas to William and Jenny and they spoke about the similar efforts they had made.*
> (Green, field notes, August 15th, 2004)

There were instances when the families would look to me for advice as a teacher. I struggled with being careful not to give them advice from my experience as a teacher in a regular school. I struggled with being careful not to give them advice which reflected a judgement as a teacher who had experienced most of her own learning in regular schools. I attempted to work hard at focusing on the home tutors' knowledge about their children first.

At least once, each of the home tutors asked me directly to compare their experiences with those of the two other families, or inadvertently joked about their experience in terms of what I might have observed at the two other families' homes. Even though I had explained in different ways and at different times that I was not interested in direct comparison, the home tutors found it difficult to resist. In the contexts in which these conversations occurred, I interpreted their questions as seeking reaffirmation of their teaching roles, rather than their varying roles in their daily family life.

Being a teacher in the community while doing this research was a mixed blessing. On several occasions, a discussion with a home tutor initiated a conversation about staff working at the Gorman School of Distance Education. I was careful to be professional (as both a teacher and as a researcher) and to not comment, agree or disagree, but listen. Additionally, there were times in my teaching role that I was forced to remember the goal of why I returned to this distance education community – to conduct my doctoral research. As revealed in the following field notes about a cluster day, my part-time teaching gave me opportunities to both experience distance education from a school staff teacher perspective and to wonder about these curriculum experiences from the perspectives of home tutors and their children.

> *Today I am teacher, not researcher. I am a Year 1 teacher of four students who will be travelling into [town] with their family for the day of school my Year 1 colleague and I have planned. There will be nine students altogether. 4.5: 1 I feel so fortunate and I am excited about the short day together.*
>
> *With feelings of excitement and nervousness in meeting one student and his family for the first time, I am accompanied by feelings of frustration. In my researcher role, I have been challenged to rethink entrenched beliefs and understandings about teaching and learning. I often fantasize about a classroom that I would now create with students. A classroom of negotiated learning, of planning from the student's genuine questions and concerns about life and living, and of responding to students in a way that I once thought was not appropriate or possible in school environments.*
>
> *Frustration is then replaced with excuses, and I stick by these excuses without doubting them...until now. Until now that the day is over, until now that the students and families are as far as four hours from me, until now that I feel I have the space to reflect. My biggest excuse: We only have such limited time with the students – how can we create an opportunity for the students to inquire deeply into a topic?*
>
> *I am displeased with why we did not ask home tutors or the children themselves what they would like to do at cluster. How would their day best be spent? I am displeased that we rushed through the day trying to fit in assessment activities without providing time for home tutors to share with us their knowings, their unknowings, their perspective, their concerns, their questions, their advice. I am displeased that I only spoke briefly with one parent. I do not know her. I am saddened that I took the easy way out and went with what was usually done, only making some suggestions for change. I promise myself next term will be different.*

> *2.45 p.m. and students and teachers rush to come together in the one hall to share what they have done during the day. The Preschoolers parade their costumes they created and wore for their day of 'imagination and monsters'. The Year 1s share their masks and tell about making jelly. The Year 2s read from the book they created together – a thesaurus. I have forgotten the other grades' experiences. My mind wandered to thoughts of relevance. How were these topics relevant to the students' lives? Could what they were learning be carried with them for the rest of their lives?*
>
> *3.00 p.m. and the teachers are in a rush to pack up and make it home to Longreach by 5.30 p.m. Families seem to know this and gather up everything and leave quickly. Perhaps they are in a hurry to get on the road also. Some teachers who are still talking with home tutors are chastised by those sitting in the car waiting to leave. Horns toot and another cluster day is relived in the drive home as passengers share their day's experiences and talk both negatively and positively of families and students. I am attentive to statements filled with assumptions and "I can imagine".*
>
> *5.30 p.m. and the cars have been refuelled and we unpack the mail and the cluster resources leaving the cars empty for refilling on Tuesday for the next cluster. Tiredness sets in and I go home for a shower…The day was enjoyable and exhausting. An early start for all. A long journey to and from for most. There were less families attending than usual and I have yet to hear why. Perhaps because it is mustering time. Perhaps because the spots carnival was only two weeks prior and several minischools are just around the corner. Or perhaps it is because no teachers asked the home tutors or children their perspectives about how the day would best be spent.*
> (Green, field notes, July 30th 2004)

As frustrating as it was to be teaching in distance education while researching it, it was even more challenging, as a teacher, to remain in a researcher role with the families in my study. I genuinely believed that it was possible for the children to experience success in the curriculum and to engage with it in ways that would generate positive feelings, positive identities, and a sense of self positively attached to both their schoolrooms and wider school communities. I struggled with wanting to spend each and every moment of the short and busy day going through the GSDE documents with each family to alter activities and supplement materials and resources so their children could find themselves in these curricula. I believed it was possible to create ways to relate the curriculum to the children's everyday lives, thus rendering it meaningful. As Aoki (1991) explains, there was a fiction of same-ness in the curriculum-as-plan that I wanted to uncover and change. I recognized the time this would require, and I wanted to respect the home tutors' autonomy in making educational decisions for their children. While I believe I showed an ethic of care toward my students and families, I experienced a sense of failure, as expressed in my field notes below, in knowing what was possible and yet not having the time and focused energy to do better in my teaching role.

> *As teacher, I spent the day with my one Year 1 student, Lucy. It was so nice having an entire day with Lucy, getting to know her as a whole person. I was also required to do some assessment with her as Mum phoned concerned about her reading. I have only read with Lucy three times on the telephone yet I, too, have some concerns. My day was also about developing a relationship with Mum. A relationship in which we could communicate openly about Lucy's learning. Mum's request for assistance seemed quite desperate and the only suggestion I could make was an extra 30 minutes of schoolwork with her daughter in a day I know is already filled with being a home tutor in the mornings and an employee in the afternoons. You see, Dad broke his neck falling off a horse; therefore, the family wouldn't have had an income during his recovery time unless Mum went out to work. With four children in the schoolroom, Mum chose to work in the afternoons when the schoolwork would be mostly complete.*
>
> *How could I ask this of her having seen the families' experience on two other inquiry visits? How could I ask to fit another 30 minutes into their daily routine? Somehow I did, and somehow Mum said they would be happy to do the extra work because 'reading is so important.' I promised I would provide as much assistance as possible…what is possible from a little office so far away from their schoolroom? Lots of resources, simple instructions to follow, some omissions from the curriculum papers, and suggestions of developing a routine…*
> (Green, field notes, August 3rd, 2004)

As indicated in the field notes below, anonymity and confidentiality also proved to be a concern and issue. It became my responsibility to be even more attentive to the ways I chose to represent the students and home tutors in the research text. I believe I have to be the primary evaluator of ethical decisions in my work. It is my own personal responsibility.

> *I am struggling with anonymity, with confidentiality – important aspects of our ethical obligation in conducting research, but less valued in a small community. A small school community which is so familiar with knowing every person's personal affairs. My deputy principal was actually bewildered that I could not tell her who the three families are. She openly made it her task to find out in the next 5 months! The deputy principal told me that it was her goal to find out who the families were by the end of my time there! Although she said she was joking, I have the sense from other colleagues that they see me as being secretive. My housemate and another friend were very concerned about my safety in travelling to these remote places so we agreed that I would write the names of the families and their telephone numbers which they can access if I do not call them one hour after my expected arrival time! At the Michaelson's, Timothy shared his news on-air – news that Miss Green was visiting!*
> (Green, field notes, August 3rd, 2004)

Finally, in writing and presenting the narratives descriptions and interpretive accounts I remind myself that they are merely my best snapshots of temporary moments in the passing stream of life. Nespor (1997) similarly cautions that events re-presented, analysed and interpreted in research are not static. I remain in contact with each family and in many ways they have changed, or their situations have changed since the observations, conversations and participatory experiences.

Wonderings about distance education

As hinted at in the reflections above, through my inquiry activities with the three families, I was both frustrated and humbled in many ways. Fortunately, the guiding conceptual framework of *place* helped to carry me past what might have been "dead ends" to achieve what might be a more useful perspective. Without *place* as a guiding concept, source of questions, and interpretive lens, it would have been easy to simply evaluate events witnessed in the schoolrooms with criteria drawn from traditional classroom models. *Place*, as a lens, enabled me to see past the four walls, the environmental print, the resources and the positioning of tables and chairs to the experiences and meanings of the pedagogic situation, "a lived situation pregnantly alive in the presence of people" (Aoki, 1991, p. 7).

With *place* as an interpretive lens I was inclined to pay attention to the ways in which each family's schoolroom—a non-static social construction--had its own rules, routines, and everyday life. I was very interested in the quality of the relationships and social interactions in the schoolrooms. I was inclined to consider how the children's experiences in the schoolrooms were the same or different from their experiences in other places. I hoped to learn about the relationships available to children and home tutors in the larger places of their everyday lives. I wanted to make sense of how what happened in the schoolrooms was connected to everyday life on the families' properties and to the contacts with GSDE staff. And I expected to learn how the identities of home tutors and children influenced the ways they shaped their everyday lives in the schoolrooms. Without such interests to guide my inquiry, it would have been tempting to focus solely on the adequacy of the teaching and learning roles and activities I witnessed.

In this section I revisit some of my frustrations and experiences of being humbled and express some of my ideas or wonderings about what could be helpful in distance education.

Awakening from my idealistic preconceptions

The perspectives I brought from my teaching background and my understanding of the curriculum often left me feeling frustrated by my observations of the teaching and learning in each schoolroom. For example, I saw opportunities for the children to complete some school learning activities outside of the schoolrooms and to integrate resources and activities from their daily lives within the curriculum. Grumet (1988, p. xiii) emphasizes the negotiable nature of the curriculum by stating, "The curriculum, in this conception, becomes tentative and provisional, a temporary and negotiated settlement between the lives we are capable of living and the ones we have."

With time, I began to appreciate that my own preconceived image of the home tutors as educators and as mothers prior to the inquiry was a distorted view of what their roles should entail and what their everyday lives should "look" like.

> *As a teacher, as a learner, I always valued learning as occurring anywhere, anytime. I imagined if I was a home tutor I would integrate formal schooling with everyday life so the schoolroom was not the only place valued for real learning. However, from my experience of the now two visits with families, I am caused to rethink. The distance education curriculum is so prescriptive and so specific that it is not always possible to learn the concepts in everyday life environments…*
> (Green, field notes, August 2nd, 2005)

In a similar manner, I was frustrated to see siblings working independently on common topics or subject areas. I observed numerous opportunities for siblings in schoolrooms to work together on learning topics. They could have conducted inquiries and completed activities using their abilities, strengths, and knowledge to assist each other. I did, however, come to appreciate the demands the home tutors experienced in working with a number of subject areas and different curricula for each child. I had to keep in mind that they did not have my educational background and insight. I find it interesting to reflect on the title, "home tutor," with regard to multi-age classrooms. Definitions of the word "tutor" found in several sources refer to one person; one more experienced other, instructing *an individual in a particular subject or skill* for the purpose of additional, special or remedial support. The instruction is *private* with the *one* being tutored. The home tutors, however, are often teaching in multi-age classrooms, guided by more than one curriculum, and working with many subject areas and topics. **I wonder how curriculum developers and school teaching staff supporting families enrolled in the distance education programs could better recognize and support the possibilities inherent in multi-age schoolrooms.**

Being in the schoolrooms, I was sometimes frustrated with the behaviour of the children. What this made me appreciate, however, is that being hundreds of kilometres away in a distance education staff office, it is easy to forget the nature and demands of educating young children and to fail to appreciate what it is like for home tutors to be with young children with all of their bodily presence. **I wonder how curriculum developers and school teaching staff supporting families enrolled in the distance education programs could better acknowledge and accommodate the characteristics of young children in their materials or suggestions.**

Louise, Kate and Cherie felt compelled to construct a no-nonsense pedagogy that permitted them to complete hectic instructional days. As a consequence, the women's relationships with their children in the schoolrooms did not consistently reflect the intimacy, patience, feeling of not being rushed, attentiveness, responsive support, and joyfulness I often witnessed in their interactions with their children outside of the schoolrooms. The home tutors experienced the project of keeping on a curriculum schedule and meeting other school-initiated requirements as a heavy responsibility and source of anxiety. In the context of their multiple roles and responsibilities, taking the time for planning and implementing additional learning activities, adapting curriculum activities or including further enjoyable learning interactions proved difficult.

Although at first I was taken aback by the home tutors' approach to completing each days' curriculum requirements, I was forced to bump into my prejudice that educators should only feel 100% commitment to their teaching roles despite encounters with the contradictions, the paradoxes in teaching, and the daily tensions of balancing the imbalances. I also came to recognize that, as teaching staff at the Gorman School of Distance Education, we could be inclined to view home tutors quite idealistically. As Lawrence Lightfoot (1978, p. 66) observes, with such idealization, mothers can also be denigrated or showered "with unrealistic expectations of their constancy, goodness and giving." It may be that the home tutors' dedication to having each day's workbook pages completed in fact contributes to their idealization. Their responses to requests or requirements showed them to be very compliant.

The home tutors sought success for their children, validation for their children's achievements, and a sense of belonging for themselves and their children within the distance education community. As dedicated and caring parents, Louise, Kate and Cherie developed and sustained a sense of compliance to the curriculum-as-plan as a way to understand their job of providing their children with a good education. The home tutors wanted to do a good job of their children's education to the best of their understanding. Completed workbooks are tangible evidence of effort. Completed workbooks submitted to the teaching staff also bring affirmation of teaching efforts and status or feelings of belonging in the distance education community. **I wonder whether the home tutors' compliance with workbooks and other assignments and the related idealizations of home tutors in fact signal the opposite of one might hope for in the children's education. And I wonder how things could be otherwise.**

Home tutors' "compliance" also took the form of accommodating additional programs and events which connected their children with the school staff teachers and/or their peers. Here, Louise explains her response to such new initiatives.

> *...if the school suddenly changes something, don't get cranky and start arguing just go with it. You might be able to fight it but not then and there and they've still got to do it so deal with the change and go with it and then talk about it with the teacher after the fact. But if you don't do it when it comes then you are suddenly well behind.* (Interview, August 17th, 2004)

Although appreciated, new programs and events became either a source of relief or a source of negative tension. For example, when school staff teachers were planning the use of the new medium of telephone for daily teaching and learning with students, Louise was positively anticipating the time when morning notices would again be finished by 8.30 a.m. This would mean that they could return to their routine of beginning the school day at an earlier time and revert back to their regular smoko break time. Consistent regularities in the "school day" that dovetailed with the rhythm of life on the properties also enabled the home tutors to cope in a practical manner with the complicated demands generated by the school and the curriculum materials.

What was perhaps most humbling for me was the human solidarity I established with the families during my inquiry. I felt how important it was to the mothers to provide refreshments for husbands and property workers at smoko time. I saw that it meant something to even see their husbands at smoko time. I felt how hard they worked to support the rhythm of life on the properties and to fulfil any other community commitments. I felt how dedicated the mothers were to the growth and wellbeing of their children and how much they and their children enjoyed each other. I came to appreciate that as "distant" distance education staff we could be guilty of regarding home tutors and their families as exotic others. Our lifestyles were very different. Although as teaching staff we were always interested in any news from the families, because of our different lifestyles such news could make families seem even more curious and "other" as opposed to enhancing any genuine solidarity.

As a teacher at the Gorman School of Distance Education, I found it easier to make assumptions about the meaning of the families' experiences, rather than conversing with them to understand how their everyday lives connected to or influenced the distance education curriculum. Upon reflection, there were not enough conversations with the families about their everyday realities. Through this inquiry I have been sensitised to the diversity which exists among families in terms of values, beliefs, life situations, needs and experiences.

> *I think a good thing is if the teachers can see the parents' set-up, which can be hard because the teachers change every year, because each place is different. That would be an advantage to the school in the long run. Maybe make a general note of it that when the teacher comes in that the computer is set up in the house and that they have to leave the schoolroom. To see how things are done. It's harder with younger kids in the schoolroom, if they could understand that a little more that they just can't dedicate the whole time to teaching.*
> (Cherie, Interview, October 4th, 2004)

This interview excerpt from Cherie speaks to the notion of context, that is, school staff teachers understanding and being able to make reference to the context in which school learning is taking place. Understanding for Cherie pertains to putting one's self in her place and seeing the situation from her perspective.

> With parents whose values, histories, and life circumstances are more similar to the teacher's, this trading of places is easier, more familiar, and natural. For others, the teacher needs to listen harder – to the text and subtext – of what is being said and stretch to make an empathetic connection. (Lawrence Lightfoot, 2003, p. 103)

My time with the three families has caused a dramatic change in my perspective. In developing a respectful, genuine relationship with the three families I have come to ask questions about **what can support school staff teachers in appreciating the crucial role of families and their contexts in the successful schooling of children? What can help them in communicating differently with parents? How might school community members meet more frequently to swap stories, share information, and problem solve? How might school of distance education teaching staff be supported in making home visits to all families to get a sense of their everyday lives both in and outside of their schoolrooms?** I am not suggesting that distance education programs simply be altered to suit individual families. I am suggesting that an appreciation of the importance of routines and relationships in families' schoolrooms and everyday lives should be considered when planning or implementing new program activities or the use of new technologies.

Home tutor/mothers and children/students constructing identities

The experience of this inquiry has also prompted my reflections about the broader social structures that limit the identities home tutors and their children can construct. The rules and routines in the larger place/community of distance education are material conditions shaping everyday life and possible identities for home tutor/mothers and children/students. In the sub-sections below I explore the significance of the procedures and practices for student evaluation, the disconnection of the curriculum from students' knowledge and interests, and the use of the term, "home tutor."

Evaluating students

Seeing the richness of the children's forms of playing, working, living and learning on their properties, I felt both humbled and frustrated when I thought about the ways students are evaluated and the ways in which the curriculum short-changes them through its disconnection with their interests and knowledge.

Currently, the students' skills, knowledge, abilities and attitudes are evaluated during rare home visits and/or school-planned events such as clusters and minischools. Home tutors receive twice-yearly reports from teaching staff, a form of governance of their child's academic and social progress, suggesting that the education of the students enrolled in the distance education program is the final responsibility of the teaching staff working in the program. School teaching staff, however, have little opportunity to witness children's growth, progress, and accomplishments both inside and outside of their schoolrooms. Yet as Fleer (2003, p. 66-67) writes, "they witness what takes place, they interact with community experiences and they are included within the day-to-day of the adult world… learning is viewed as embedded in everyday activity." **I wonder how "report cards" might better reflect and honour the diverse forms of growth, learning, and achievement in which the children are engaged in their daily lives. Further, if report cards acknowledged a broader range of children's capabilities and accomplishments, how might this play out in children's identities as students?**

Connecting the curriculum to students' identities

If students' report cards were constructed to more holistically portray their knowledge, skills, interests, values, and learning strengths, and achievements, the availability of such "identity inventories" would also enhance opportunities for teaching staff or curriculum developers to suggest helpful curriculum modifications. **I wonder how school teaching staff in a prep room might work from an awareness of such "identity inventories" for children in on-air lessons, clusters and minischools.**

Home tutor/mothers' identities

Although the children brought a less than enthusiastic attitude to their schoolrooms, their appreciation of having their mothers as their teachers was palpable. Given my frustrations with many curricular or pedagogical shortcomings in the schoolrooms, I found the children's appreciation of their mother-teachers humbling. It reminded me how important relationships are as a structural formation of place and how much they enable any everyday life activities that will transpire there. These paradoxes and all of my experiences in the inquiry prompted me to reflect on the significance of whether home tutors, being parents, are recognized as being teachers. In the two paragraphs below, I review the uses of the terms, "home tutor," vs. teacher or teaching in the GSDE community.

At the Gorman School of Distance Education, adults teaching and learning with children through the distance education program are given the title of "home tutor". It is a universal term used in the school community by staff as they verbally refer to, and/or textually correspond with, a student's parent or governess. "Home tutor" is also used in the curriculum materials to address a student's parent or governess as they read through and follow the materials. Additionally, it is a term in the students' workbooks as they read the activities to be completed, for example, "Ask your home tutor to find…" or '"Your home tutor will help you…" There are "home tutor guides" in the curriculum packs, "home tutor sessions" as an aspect of the on-air timetable for each year level, and "home tutor notes" sent to each family by each Year level staff at the beginning of a new unit of work to assist in the teaching of that unit. Parents or governesses send in "home tutor" feedback sheets at the completion of a unit to school of distance education staff, and school of distance education staff return feedback in forms such as "a note from your teacher."

Within the curriculum materials and in the wider culture of the Gorman School of Distance Education, teaching is referred to as a quality school teaching staff have; staff who have educational degrees, and therefore, individual pedagogical expertise. For example, I noticed that school staff teachers share their expertise in the home tutor workshop, whereas more experienced home tutors were required to volunteer to hold a session of a more practical nature about how to "make things easier" in the schoolroom.

The vast majority of home tutors at the Gorman School of Distance Education are mothers and I am struck by the general reluctance in distance education to recognize that parents are teachers. Parenting entails teaching one's children. Does the separation of the notion of parent from the notion of teacher serve to dismiss the teaching role of parents and/or reduce the idea of teaching to a technical activity undertaken within a professional discourse? Fitzpatrick (1982, p. 189) also questions the lack of recognition of parents as teachers.

> The nomenclatural dichotomy of ['home tutor'] / 'teacher' may be administratively convenient and may have legal and historical foundations, but it belies the relationship between the two and their functions. At the very least, the mother is a teacher without portfolio.

Lawrence-Lightfoot (2003, p. 190) also challenges the misconception that "a mother's attachment to, and advocacy for, her child blinds her to his or her imperfections and weaknesses and makes her incapable of challenging and judging him or her in the ways that will produce optimal learning." I observed that the ways in which Louise, Kate and Cherie talked about their children revealed considerable insight into their children's personal and academic abilities, challenges, interests and desires. These observations led me to concur with Lawrence-Lightfoot's (2003, p. 194) view of "the more complete, holistic view that parents have of their children" and helped me to slowly recognize "the narrowness of [my] own teacher vision." The home tutors' perceptions of their children were more holistic, more subjective, and more passionate (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003) than my own of children in my class at the Gorman School of Distance Education. Although I have gained a greater appreciation of and respect for the home tutors' practical knowledge of their children, out of respect for their privacy, I have refrained from more completely representing this knowledge in the pages of this research text.

I wonder what could be possible if "teaching" referred to something that was accomplished collectively by the distance education community as a whole and through the relationships between families, the school and the school community. If the dominant discourse was changed in this way, how far-reaching might the implications be? As a move in this direction, could it be helpful to change the title of "home tutor" to "home educator"?

These reflections and wonderings are offered, not with the expectation of closing possibilities, but rather as a potential point of departure for beginning conversations about new possibilities in distance education in Australia. I hope and expect that through readers' responses and interpretations of this text, even more provocative ideas and questions about practice and research will be generated.

Evaluating the goodness of the inquiry

Cherie asked me if the photos her children had taken were what I wanted and I replied that the project was open-ended and we would have a conversation around them tomorrow.

Cherie's question causes me to reflect on this data collection experience. Am I doing okay? I don't know. I feel very isolated from communication with other researchers. I wonder if this is part of what Louise was saying in our most recent taped conversation together. Email and phone, yes, but I am still one person doing this on my own in isolation.

While I worry if I have enough data, many of the research participants' comment on how much I write – home tutors, VISE tutors and students! It is the holidays and time for me to really take the time to reflect upon, and analyse my observational notes. What do I seem to be capturing? What is missing? What is contradictory? Can I focus on anything particular in interviews or during observations next term?
(Green, field notes, September 12th, 2004)

Phew! My car was like a sauna today – summer has certainly arrived in Western Queensland since my last visit just before the two-week spring holidays. It will only become worse though as the temperatures move from the high 30's as it was today to high 40's in January and February. -

I am concerned that my research visits and data collection will come to an end for the wrong reasons. I believe I will cease my visits when the heat of the day prevents me from travelling – too uncomfortable for my body and too much strain on my vehicle. I believe another factor which may accelerate my decision to cease data collection will be the increasingly hectic last term of the school year. I have tried very hard to devote equal time and energy to my teaching position as support and guide to home tutors and students, and to my research position as inquirer. Yet, I am concerned that I haven't managed this balance as well as I had hoped and I did not fulfil both positions to my satisfaction. I am also struggling financially and ceasing the travelling to the families' places will contribute the $120 per month on gas, and the cost of paying the transcriber approximately $135 per month, to my part-time salary.
While these are concerns that my supervisory committee will need to judge, I feel I have done my best with the resources available to me.
(Green, field notes, October 3rd, 2004)

I have read the ideas of many scholars to consider criteria for evaluating the trustworthiness of my interpretations of the families' experiences enrolled in the Gorman

School of Distance Education (for example, Connelly & Clandinin, 1991; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Eisner, 1998; Ellis, 1998; Leedy, 2001; Packer & Addison, 1989; Reissman, 1993). Sparkes (1995, p. 185) suggests that,

> the emergence of a multitude of criteria for judging both the process and products of qualitative research clearly signals that there can be no canonical approach to this form of inquiry, no recipes or rigid formulas, since different validation procedures or sets of criteria may be better suited to some situations and forms of representation than others.

Prior to beginning this inquiry I did my best to identify and acknowledge my own related experiences and pre-understandings. By conducting the inquiry over a five-month period and by using multiple methods I endeavoured to achieve depth and breadth in the collection of data. Throughout the inquiry, I took self-conscious responsibility for the analyses and interpretations I was constructing. In doing so, I was particularly attentive to language and the ways in which it both enables and limits interpretation by both participants and myself. Regarding the importance of language, Gallagher, (1992, p. 5) writes, "Language is a central concern of hermeneutics because of its importance in the process of interpretation…Understanding is not an abstract mental act; it is a linguistic event. Language has a central role to play in understanding the world." In my writing I strove to achieve verisimilitude to facilitate readers' understanding of how I came to see the families' experiences the way I do, even if readers may construct alternate interpretations and insights (Ellis, 1998). In all aspects of the research, I gave priority to treating participants with an ethic of care. This entailed exercising thoughtful judgment and being mindful to produce a multi-voiced text (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). In presenting my process and findings, I worked to preserve the integrity of the research by acknowledging and revealing the messiness and difficulty of the inquiry (Aston, 2001).

To evaluate an interpretive account, Ellis (1998) recommends asking questions such as the following. Has the researcher's understanding been transformed? Is it plausible, convincing? Does it fit with other material we know? Has a solution been uncovered? Does it lead to helpful action? Does it have the power to change practice? Have new possibilities been opened up for the researcher, research participants, and the structure of the context?

I am openly mindful about offering only a selection of possible perspectives on the pages of this dissertation. My perspectives are also open to further interpretation. I acknowledge that readers of the narrative portraits and interpretive work in chapters 5 through 10 will likely be able to generate counter-interpretations working from their own forestructures. My intention was to have my analysis and interpretation chapters function as an essay supported by "enough illustrative material to enable readers with different perspectives to form their own interpretations" (Ellis, 1998, p. 32). I understand that a research text is not "definitive and final, but is one that keeps open the possibility and the responsibility of *returning*, for the *very next instance* might demand of us that we understand anew" (Jardine, 1998, p. 43).

Through my development of a more experientially holistic and theoretical understanding of three families' experiences of distance education, I continued my journey as a lifelong learner. At the very least, the research will inform my thinking and actions as an educator, teacher educator, curriculum developer, and researcher.

As this dissertation, and other modes of dissemination I will undertake, joins the conversation about distance education in Australia, I hope it will support more useful ways of thinking about these experiences. I also hope that this example may invite other researchers of distance education in Australia to consider similar methods and conceptual frameworks in their work.

REFERENCES

Anderson, K & Jack, D.C. (1991). *Learning to listen: Interview techniques and analyses in Women's words: The feminist practice of oral history*. New York: Routledge.

Aoki, T. (1991). Teaching as in-dwelling between two curriculum worlds. In T. Aoki (Ed.), *Inspiriting curriculum and pedagogy: Talks to teachers* (pp. 7-10). Edmonton, Alberta: University of Alberta.

Ashcroft, B. (2001). *Post-colonial transformation*. New York: Routledge.

Aston, J. (2001). Research as relationship. In A. L. Cole & J.G. Knowles (Ed.), *Lives in context: The art of life history research* (pp. 145-151). California: AltaMira Press.

Bach, H. (2001). The place of the photograph in visual narrative research. *Afterimage*, *29*(3), 7.

Bartlett, S. (1990). A childhood remembered. *Children's environments quarterly*, *7*(4), 2-4.

Basso, K.H. (1996). Wisdom sits in places: Notes on a Western Apache landscape. In S. Feld & K.H. Basso (Eds), *Senses of place* (p. 53-90). Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research.

Bateson, M. C. (1994). *Peripheral visions: Learning along the way*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers Inc.

Bogdan, R. C., & Bicklen, S. K. (1992). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theory and methods* (2nd ed.). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Boylan, C. (1996). *Helping isolated rural parents: The home tutor support program*. Retrieved August 5th, 2003, from http://www.aare.edu.au/96pap/boyle96.348

Boylan, C., & Squires, D. (August, 1996). *Supporting home tutors in providing quality education*. Paper presented at 12th National Society for the Provision of Education in Rural Australia, Hobart, Tasmania.

Boylan, C., & Wallace, A. (1999). *Distance teaching and learning using satellite technology systems: A report on the evaluation of the New South Wales Outback Satellite Education Trial*. Wagga Wagga, Australia: Centre for Rural Social Research.

Boylan, C., Wallace, A., & Richmond, W. (2000). Remote student access to education via satellite delivery. *Education in Rural Australia, 10*(1), 2-12.

Brey, P. (1998). Space-shaping technologies and the geographical disembedding of place. In A. S. Light, J.M. (Ed.), *Philosophy and geography III* (pp. 239 - 263). New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

Caine, V. F. J. (2002). *Storied moments: A visual narrative inquiry of aboriginal women living with HIV*. Unpublished Master of Nursing, University of Alberta, Edmonton.

Cannella, G.S. (1997). *Deconstructing early childhood education: Social justice and revolution*. New York: Peter Lang.

Canning, C. (1992). Interpretive Inquiry: If you are going to use it, you will be doing it. In N. L. Haggerson & Bowman, A.C. (Ed.), *Informing educational policy and practice through interpretive inquiry* (pp. 61-82). Pennsylvania: Technomic Publishing Company, Inc.

Canter, D. (1977). *The psychology of place*. London: The Architectural Press Ltd.

Cappello, M. (April, 2001). *Photography as a data generation tool for qualitative inquiry in education*. Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association Conference, Seattle, Washington.

Caragata, L. (1998). New meanings of place: The place of the poor and the loss of place as centre of mediation. *Philosophy and Geography Vol. III: Philosophies of Place*, 215 237.

Carson, T. R. (1986). Closing the gap between research and practice: Conversation as a mode of doing research. *Phenomenology + Pedagogy, 4*(2), 73-85.

Chawla, L. (1992). *Childhood place attachment*. In I. Altman and S. M. Low (eds.), Place Attachment (pp. 63 – 86). New York: Plenum Press

Chawla, L. (2002). *Growing up in an urbanizing world*. London: UNESCO/Earthscan.

Clandinin, D. J. & Connelly, F. M. (1994). Personal experience methods. In N. K. Denzin, & Y.S. Lincoln (Ed.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 413-427). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Clandinin, D. J. & Connelly, F. M. (2000). *Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Clark, C. & Uzzell, D. L. (2002). The affordances of the home, neighbourhood, school and town centre for adolescents. *Journal of Environmental Psychology, 22*, 95 – 108.

Cole, A. L. & Knowles, J.G. (1995). Crossing borders for professional development: Narratives of exchange teachers. In D. Thomas (Ed.), *Teachers' stories* (pp. 121-151). Buckingham: Open University Press.

Connelly, F. M. & Clandinin, D. J. (1991). Narrative inquiry: Storied experience. In E. C. Short (Ed.), *Forms of curriculum inquiry* (pp. 121-153). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Crang, M. (1998). *Cultural geography*. New York: Routledge.

Cuba, L. & Hummon, D. (1993). A place to call home: Identification with dwelling, community, and region. *Sociological Quarterly, 34*, 111 - 131.

Dahlberg, G., Moss, P., & Pence, A. (1999). *Beyond quality in early childhood education and care: Postmodern perspectives*. London: Falmer Press.

Davis, B. & Sumara, D.J. (2000). Curriculum forms: on the assumed shapes of knowing and knowledge. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 32(6), 821-845.

Denzin, N. K. & Lincoln, Y.S. (1998). Introduction: Entering the field of qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Ed.), *Strategies of qualitative inquiry* (pp. 1-34). California: Sage Publications.

Denzin, N. K. & Lincoln, Y.S. (2000). Introduction: The discipline and practice of qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Ed.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (pp. 1-28). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Derr, V. (2002). Children's sense of place in northern New Mexico. *Journal of Environmental Psychology, 22*, 125 – 137.

Duncum, P. & Cassidy, H. (1994). Valuing arts education in isolated Queensland. *Education in Rural Australia, 4*(1), 25-30.

Eisner, E. W. (1998). *The enlightened eye: Qualitative inquiry and the enhancement of educational practice*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc.

Eisner, E. W. (2002). *The educational imagination: on the design and evaluation of school programs*. Upper Saddle River, N.J: Merrill/Prentice Hall.

Ellis, J. L. (1998). Introduction: The teacher as interpretive inquirer. In J. L. Ellis (Ed.), *Teaching from understanding: Teacher as interpretive inquirer* (pp. 5-14). New York: Garland Publishing, Inc.

Ellis, J. L. (1998). Interpretive inquiry as a formal research process. In J. L. Ellis (Ed.), *Teaching from understanding: Teacher as interpretive inquirer* (pp. 15 - 32). New York: Garland Publishing, Inc.

Ellis, J. L. (1998). Narrative inquiries with children and youth. In J. L. Ellis (Ed.), *Teaching from understanding: Teacher as interpretive inquirer* (pp. 33 - 55). New York: Garland Publishing, Inc.

Ellis, J. (2002). The importance of attending to children and place. *International Journal of Educational Policy, Research and Practice*, *3*(3), 69-88.

Ellis, J. (2003). Researching children's place and space. *The Journal of Curriculum Theorizing, 19*(4), 118-133.

Ellis, J. (2004). The significance of place in the curriculum of children's everyday lives. *Taboo: the Journal of Culture and Education*, 8(1), (Spring-Summer), 23-42.

Ellis, J. (In press) Place and identity for children in classrooms and schools. *Journal of Canadian Association of Curriculum Studies*.

Ely, M., & Anzul, M. (1991). *Doing qualitative research: Circles within circles*. London: Falmer Press.

Eyles, J. (1989). The Geography of everyday life. In M.J. Clarke, K.J. Gregory and A.M. Gurnell (Eds.), *Horizons in physical geography* (pp. 102 – 117). Houndmills: Macmillan.

Feeney, S., Christensen, D., & Moravcik, E. (2001). *Who am I in the lives of children? An introduction to teaching young children* (6th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill/Prentice Hall.

Finger, G., & Rotolo, C. (December, 2001). *Telephone teaching: Towards constructivist teaching for rural and remote students*. Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Australian Association for Research in Education, Fremantle, Western Australia.

Fitzpatrick, J. (1982). The Australian schools of the air: the conundrum of who teaches. *Distance Education, 3*(2), 183-197.

Fleer, M. (2003). Early childhood education as an evolving 'community of practice' or as lived 'social reproduction': Researching the 'taken-for-granted'. *Contemporary issues in early childhood, 4*(1), 64 – 79.

Fournier, S. (1991). A meaning-based framework for the study of consumer-object relations. *Advances in Consumer Research. 18*, 736-742.

Fowler, B. (1987). Aussat and all that! Reaching the Australian outback. *Australian Journal of Educational Technology, 3*(2), 119-128.

Fried, M. (1963). Grieving for a lost home: In L. J. Duhl (Ed.), *Urban Condition: People and policy in the metropolis* (pp.). New York: Basic Books.

Frost, R. (2001). Children with special needs, teachers with special needs. In M. Dadds & S. Hart (Ed.), *Doing practitioner research differently* (pp. 13-26). London: RoutledgeFalmer.

Gadamer, H. (1998). *Truth and Method.* Second revised edition. New York: Crossroad.

Gallagher, S. (1992). *Hermeneutics and education.* Albany: State University of New York Press.

Gibson, E. J. (1991). The ecological approach: A foundation for environmental psychology. In R. M. Downs, L. S. Liben and D. S. Palermo (Eds.), *Visions of Aesthetics, the environment and Development: The Legacy of Joachim F. Wohlwill* (pp. 87 – 108). New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Giddens, A. (1991). *Modernity and self-identity.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Grumet, M. (1988). *Bitter milk: Women and teaching.* Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.

Grumet, M. (1995). The curriculum: What are the basics and are we teaching them? In J.L. Kincheloe & S.R. Steinberg (Eds), *Thirteen Questions: Reframing Education's Conversation* (pp. 15-21). New York: Peter Lang.

Guba, E. G. & Lincoln, Y.S. (1994). Competing paradigms in qualitative research. In E.G. Guba & Y.S. Lincoln (Ed.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 105-117).Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Gussow, A. (1971). *A Sense of Place: The artist and the American landscape*. San Francisco: Friends of the Earth.

Halse (1985). School of the air: 'An international reputation…'. *Education Western Australia*, 34(1), 25-26.

Harley, M. F. (1985). An alternative educational model for early childhood distance education programs. *Distance Education, 6*(2), 158-168.

Hart, R. (1979). *Children's experience of place.* New York: Irving.

Hay, R.B. (1988). Toward a theory of sense of place. *The Trumpeter*, *5*, 159-164.

Helfenbein, R. J. (2004). Space, place, and identity in the teaching of history: Using critical geography to teach teachers in the American South. In A. Segall and E. Heilman (Eds.), *Social studies--the next generation: Re-searching in the postmodern.* Peter Lang.

Hester, R.T. (1985). Subconscious landscapes in the heart. *Places*, 2, 10 – 22.

Higgins, A. H. (1994). A background to rural education schooling in Australia. *Journal of Research in Rural Education, 10*(1), 48-57.

Holloway, S. L., & Valentine, G. (2000). Spatiality and the new social studies of childhood. *Sociology, 34*(4), 763 - 783.

Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission. (2000). *Education Access: National inquiry in rural and remote education.* Sydney, Australia: National Library of Australia Cataloguing-in-Publication.

Jardine, D. W. (1998). *To dwell with a boundless heart: Essays in curriculum theory, hermeneutics, and the ecological imagination.* New York: Peter Lang.

Jardine, D. W. (2000). "*Under the tough old stars*" *Ecopedagogical essays.* Brandon, VT: The Foundation for Educational Renewal, Inc.

Knowles, J. G. (1988). Parents' rationales and teaching methods for home schooling: The role of biography. *Education and Urban Society, 21*(1), 69-84.

Knowles, J. G. (1998). Home education: Personal histories. In M. L. Fuller & G. Olsen (Ed.), *Home-school relations: working successfully with parents and families* (pp. 302-331). Massachussettes: Allyn & Bacon.

Knowles, J. G. (2001). Responsibilities to community: Relationality and mutuality with home-educating families. In A. L. Cole & J.G. Knowles (Ed.), *Lives in context: the art of life history research* (pp. 137-144). California: AltaMira Press.

Leadbetter, B. (1998). *The application of audiographic and internet technologies in distance education: A case study.* Paper presented at the 3rd International Conference on Open Learning, Brisbane, Australia.

Leedy, P. D. & Ormrod, J.E. (2001). *Practical research: Planning and design* (7th ed.). New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc.

Langhout, R. D. (2003). Reconceptualizing quantitative and qualitative methods: A case study dealing with place as an exemplar. American Journal of Community Psychology, *32*(3/4), 229 – 244.

Lawrence Lightfoot, S. (2003). (2003). *The Essential Conversation: What parents and teachers can learn from each other*. New York: Random House.

Lawrence Lightfoot, S. (1978). *Worlds apart: Relationships between families and schools*. Basics Books, Inc: New York.

Lincoln, Y.S., & Guba, E.G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Lincoln, Y.S., & Guba, E.G. (1989). Ethics: The failure of positivist science. *Review of Higher Education, 12*(3), 221-240.

Lippard, L.R. (1997). The lure of the local: Senses of place in a multicoated society. The New Press: New York.

Lofland, J. & Lofland, L.H. (1995). *Analyzing social settings: A guide to qualitative observation and analysis*. California: Wadsworth Publishing Company.

Louden, W. & Rivalland, J. (1995). *Literacy at a distance: Language and learning in distance education*. Retrieved August 9th, 2003, from http://www.gu.edu.au/school/cls/clearinghouse/

Malchiodi (1998).*Understanding children's drawings*. New York: The Guilford Press.

Mallan, K. (1996). Storytelling and rural areas (SARA): Making links between home and school. *Australian Journal of Early Childhood, 21*(1), 1-5.

Mayberry, M., Knowles, G.J., Ray, B. & Marlow, S. (1995). *Home Schooling*. California: Corwin Press, Inc.

Mergendoller, J. R. (1989). Good and Ill Will. In M. J. Packer & R.B. Addison. (Ed.), *Entering the circle: hermeneutic investigation in psychology* (pp. 119-138). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Merriam, S. B. (1998) (Ed.). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education: Revised and expanded from Case study research in education.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Miller, J.P., & Seller, W. (1985). *Curriculum perspectives and practice*. New York: Longman Inc.

Moffat, A. (1997). *A history of distance learning in Queensland and the Longreach School of Distance Education*. [Brochure] Longreach, Queensland: Author.

Mountford, A., Cottam, E., Kirby, A., Zubrinich, P., Webster, G., Harvey, P., Smith, D., & Speight, G. (1986). *A report on the current situation for children enrolled in the South Australian school of the air*. Education Department of SA, Western Area.

Nespor, J. (1997). *Tangled up in school: Politics, space, bodies, and signs in the educational process*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc: New Jersey.

Packer, M. J., & Addison, R.B. (1989). Evaluating an interpretive account. In M. J. Packer & R.B. Addison. (Ed.), *Entering the circle: hermeneutic investigation in psychology* (pp. 275-292). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Pinar, W.F. (1997). The reconceptualization of curriculum studies. In D.J. Flinders & S.J. Thornton (Ed.), *The curriculum studies reader* (pp. 121-129). New York: Routledge.

Pinar, W. F., Reynolds, W. M., Slattery, P. & Taubman, P. M. (2000). *Understanding curriculum: An introduction to the study of historical and contemporary curriculum discourse*. New York: Peter Lang.

Pink, S. (2001). *Doing visual ethnography : images, media and representation in research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Polkinghorne, D. (1995). Narrative configuration in qualitative analysis. In J.A. Hatch & R. Wisniewski, (Ed.), *Life history and narrative* (pp. 5-23). Washington, DC: Falmer Press.

Rapoport, A. (1982). *The meaning of the built environment*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.

Rasmussen, K. (2004). Places for children – Children's places. *Childhood, 11*(2), 155 – 173.

Relph, E. (1976). *Place and placelessness*. London: Pion Limited.

Relph, E. (1993). Modernity and the reclamation of place. In D. Seamon (Ed.), *Dwelling, seeing, and designing: Toward a phenomenological ecology* (pp. 25 40). New York: State University of New York Press.

Richardson, L. (1994). Writing: A method of inquiry. In N. K. L. Denzin, Y.S. (Ed.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 516-529).

Riessman, C. K. (1993). *Narrative analysis*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Rivlin, L.G. (1990). The significance of home and homelessness, *Marriage and Family Review, 15* (1-2), 39-56.

Scott, D. & Usher, R. (1999). *Researching education: Data methods and theory in educational enquiry*. London: Cassell.

Seamon, D. (1979). *A geography of the lifeworld: Movement, rest and encounter.* London: Croom Helm.

Seidman, I. E. (1991). *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Smith, J. K. (1993). *After the demise of empiricism: The problem of judging social and education inquiry.* Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Smith, D. G. (1991). Hermeneutic inquiry: The hermeneutic imagination and the pedagogic text. In E. C. Short (Ed.), *Forms of curriculum inquiry* (pp. 187-209). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Smith, D. G. (2002). Hermeneutic scholar. In M. P. Wolf & C.R. Pryor (Ed.), *The mission of the scholar: Research and practice* (pp. 183-200). New York: Peter Lang Publishing.

Smith, J. M., Light, A., & Roberts, D. (1998). Introduction: Philosophies and geographies of place. In A. Light & J. M. Smith (Eds.), *Philosophy and geography III: Philosophies of place* (pp. 1-13). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Sobel, D. (1990). *Children's special places: Exploring the roles of forts, dens, and bush houses in middle childhood.* Tucson: Zephyr PR

Sparkes, A. C. (1995). Writing people: Reflections on the dual crisis of representation and legitimation in qualitative inquiry. *Quest, 47*, 158-195.

Stake, R. E. (1998). Case Studies. In N. K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Ed.), *Strategies of qualitative inquiry* (pp. 86-109). California: Sage Publications.

Stevens, K. (1994). Australian developments in distance education and their implications for rural schools. *Journal of Research in Rural Education, 10*(1), 78-83.

Staton, J. (1987). The power of responding in dialogue journals. In T. Fulwiler (Ed.), *The journal book* (pp. 47-63). Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook Publishers.

Stokols, D. (1990). Instrumental and spiritual views of people-environment relations. *American Psychologist, 45*, 641 - 646.

Stokols, D. & Shumaker, S. A. (1981). People in places: A transactional view of settings. In J. Harvey (Ed.), *Cognition, social behavior, and the environment* (pp. 441 – 488). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Taylor, P. C. (1985). Illuminating primary Distance Education in Australia. *Programmed Learning and Educational Technology*, 22(4), 321-326.

The State of Queensland (Department of Education). (1995). Mathematics handbook: Year 1. Queensland: Open Access Support Centre.

The State of Queensland (Department of Education). (2002-2003). *The learning place: About Schools of Distance Education.* Retrieved August 8th, 2003, from http://education.qld.gov.au/curriculum/service/distance/

The Queensland Government (Office of Economic and Statistical Research). (2003). *Regional profiles: Central west.* Retrieved April 8th, 2003, from http://www.oesr.qld.gov.au/views/regional/lga_profiles/profiles_fs.htm

Thomas, D. (1995). Treasonable or trustworthy text: Reflection on teacher narrative studies. In D. Thomas (Ed.), *Teachers' stories* (pp. 1-23). Buckingham: Open University Press.

Tomlinson, D., Coulter, F. & Peacock, J. (1985). *Teaching and learning at home: Distance education and the isolated child.* The University of Western Australia, Nedlands: National Centre for Research in Rural Education.

Touliatos & Compton. (1983). Approaches to child study. Minneapolis, MN: Burgess Publishing Company.

Tuan, Y. (1977). *Space and place: The perspective of experience.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

van Manen, M. (1990). Practicing phenomenological writing. *Phenomenology & Pedagogy, 2*(1), 36-69.

Vivian, V. (1986). Electronic mail in a children's distance course: Trial and evaluation. *Distance Education,* 7(2), 237-260.

Walker, R. (1993). Finding a silent voice for the researcher: Using photographs in evaluation and research. In M. Schratz (Ed.), *Qualitative voices in educational research* (pp. 72-92). London: Falmer Press.

Weber, S. J. (1986). The nature of interviewing. *Phenomenology + Pedagogy*, *4*(2), 65-72.

Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning and identity.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Whitmount, T. (1992, 8 September). Pencils down, children...over. *The Bulletin*, 46-47.

Whitting, M. & Boyd, J. (2000). 'Schools in' or 'gathering our treasures'. *Education in Rural Australia, 10*(1), 51-55.

Williams, D.R. (1995). *Mapping Place Meanings for Ecosystem Management*. Retrieved March 20h, 2005, from http://www.icbemp.gov/science/williamd.pdf

Young, E. (1992). *Seven blind mice*. New York: Philomel Books.

GLOSSARY

Cluster	Children who are in the same year level and live close to each other may join in together in their own area to participate in what is called a cluster. Teaching staff travel to various towns to meet with the children and their families for a day of "school". The number of clusters each group can attend is usually four per year.
Governess	A female employee from outside of the family who teaches the children the formal curriculum work.
Jackaroo	A man who is learning to work on a sheep or cattle station.
Jillaroo	A woman who is learning to work on a sheep or cattle station.
LAC 1	Curriculum materials focused on the subject area of English and activities for specifically teaching and learning about such things as reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing, shaping, generic structure, vocabulary and pronunciation.
LAC 2	Curriculum materials focused on the theme introduced in LAC 1 and integrated with the subject areas of Science, Health, Art, Music, Physical Education and Social Studies.
Minischool	Minischools are held at the school and the children have a week of school with their classmates and teacher. Activities are planned for the afternoon and evening. The students stay at the school in an accommodation unit. Parents or Home Tutors are asked to be supervisors at minischools.
Mustering	The movement of sheep, cattle, horses and goats using horses, trailers, motorbikes, vehicles or helicopters. Livestock are mustered for reasons such as: stock health and condition assessment and treatments, preparation for transport or sale or implementation of breeding strategies and plans.
Property	Equivalent to the terms "ranch" or "station" used in North America.
Revision weeks	Weeks set aside in the "Paper Return Calendar" each term in which formal curriculum units are not expected to be completed. It is common for families to use this time to catch up on schoolwork or to plan revision activities using activities they did not utilise during previous curriculum units.
Smoko	A short break from work, usually in the morning between breakfast and lunch, or in the afternoon between lunch and dinner. Similar to

	the term "recess" used in North America.
VISE tutors	Volunteers For Isolated Students' Education (VISE) is a volunteer educational service set up to assist children and parents in remote areas of Australia. VISE tutors are mainly retired teachers or adults with experience in education. VISE tutors stay with families for about six weeks. Their travel and accommodation costs are paid for by the family requesting a tutor.

APPENDIX A

LETTERS OF INTRODUCTION

From Acting Deputy Principal

July 12th, 2004

To Distance Education Parents & Home Tutors,

We would like to welcome back Nicole Green from 2 years study leave in Canada. Nicole has been completing her PhD in Education at the University of Alberta. She has now returned to [Gorman] School of Distance Education as a classroom teacher with Year One. This is her 2nd position at the school, prior being involved with Year One & Preschool. Nicole will be spending 2.5 days a week with her Year One class until the end of the year and 2 days of a school week travelling in her own time and at her own expense to visit 3 separate families to complete her study.

Nicole is looking for 3 families who would be able to assist her in this inquiry. This would be a great opportunity to support her study and the chance to share your experiences in Distance Education with a wider community. The way our students learn is a unique and distinctive form of education.

Please take the time to read the following letter from Nicole asking for participants in this valuable study. Contact Nicole if you are interested in being considered for this inquiry. The school supports Nicole in her endeavour and wishes her all the best and look forward to reading about the experiences shared amongst our school community.

Acting Deputy Principal.

To parents/home tutors

July 12th, 2004

Dear Families,

As well as working part-time for the remainder of this year at the [Gorman] School of Distance Education, I remain enrolled as a doctoral student at the University of Alberta in Edmonton, Canada. As my doctoral thesis for my PhD program I am interested in inquiring into three families' experiences of distance education. I am writing to invite you and your child/ren to participate in my research, which will explore the ways families create and experience the school learning place. I am interested in questions such as: How do home tutors and students experience distance education? What is it like for the home tutors to participate in distance education? What is it like for the students to participate in distance education? What is the meaning of the distance education activities for the home tutors/students? What is the significance of distance education in the context of the rest of the families' lives?

If you agree to be involved in this research, I will visit with your family three days once per month over a period of approximately five months.
On each visit we will organize a time to have a more formal conversation about different aspects of your familial and educational lives. These conversations will be audio taped and you may decline to answer any question you choose.
I will ask your permission to observe school days in your home. The days for observing in your home will be arranged between us each month.
Between some visits, I will ask you to take photographs, so we can then use those photographs as a basis for conversation. I will provide digital cameras or you may use your own camera if you prefer and I will provide the film.
So that our inquiry relationship can continue between visits, I will ask you to keep a dialogue journal, a space and place to write about events as they happen; record impressions, thoughts and reactions to events and experiences; and to work through and make sense of your experiences. In response to your writing I will share with you my own personal comments in writing, including ideas, feelings and concerns, sometimes asking for clarification or asking questions to search for deeper meaning in what you have written in your journal.
I may also ask for copies of appropriate resources to help make sense of situations or to deepen my understanding of events. Examples may include school newsletters or other communications, timetables, schedules or planning developed by you, curriculum documents and schoolwork completed by the child/ren.

If you agree to be involved in this research, you will be invited to read the summaries of field notes I record and transcripts from interviews and conversations so we can discuss together emerging themes, contradictions and interpretations.

You are under no obligation to grant me permission to include yourself in this research project, and you may opt out at any time without penalty. In this event, any collected data will be withdrawn and not included in the research.

I also ask to have your child participate in this research. Your child/ren's participation would include activities such as the following:

- Observed during school time
- Tape recorded during interviews
- Photographed

And to:

- Let me keep copies of drawings and photographs your child/ren make for me (These will not be published.)

The findings of this research study will be used for my doctoral dissertation/thesis guided by the following focus - how does this research project inform me about the ways the school learning place is experienced and created and, reflecting upon these findings, how can the research inform the practice of staff working in distance education programs?

I will conduct this research and handle all data in compliance with the Standards for Ethical Research at the University of Alberta and with Education Queensland. I will use a pseudonym for you in any papers, publications and presentations so that your identity will remain confidential. I will provide you with a copy of any papers, publications and presentations resulting from the research if you wish and I will be pleased to discuss it with you. The interviews will be typed into transcripts and will be seen by myself and professors on my research committee at the University of Alberta. I will keep all transcripts and other data secure while it is in my possession.

If you have any questions about this request, please contact me at ncgreen@ualberta.ca or 4658 4228. I am hoping to work with three families so not all families who kindly volunteer will be part of the study this year.

This study has been reviewed and approved by the Research Ethics Board of the Faculties of Education and Extension at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, you can contact the Chair of the Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta at 0011 1 7804923751 or Rebecca Nguyen at 07 3237 1120 at Education Queensland in Brisbane.

Thank you for considering this request.

Cordially,
Nicole Green.

To children

July, 2004

Dear (Child),

My name is Miss Green. As well as being a teacher at the Gorman School of Distance Education, I am a student at a University in Canada. I am learning to be a better teacher of children like yourself.

I would like to invite you to give me permission to observe your "school time" at home with your family and spend time with you outside of the schoolroom. This will help me and other teachers like myself to understand how you and your family experience home schooling and what it is like to do your schooling at home.

If you choose to participate you may change your mind at any time if you are not feeling comfortable with me observing you during your school day or in any other activities we do together. We would choose together another name so when I write about the things you do during your school day at home, no one will know I am talking about you.

If you are willing to be observed, photographed and tape recorded, please complete the attached form by writing your name.

Thank you very much!

Sincerely,

Miss (Nicole) Green.

APPENDIX B

CONSENT FORMS

For parents/home tutors

I, ____, hereby consent
(print name)

to be:

- Observed
- Tape recorded
- Interviewed
- Photographed

by ____
(print researcher's name)

And to have my dialogue journals and photographs included in Nicole Green's data analysis

- Dialogue journals
- Photographs (These are for use in data analysis but will not be published.)

I understand that:

- I may withdraw from the research at any time without penalty
- all information gathered will be treated confidentially and discussed only with the instructor and reported to my classmates
- any information that identifies myself will be destroyed upon completion of this research
- I will not be identifiable in any documents resulting from this research

I also understand that the results of this research will be used for Nicole Green's doctoral dissertation at the University of Alberta, and in scholarly publications and presentations.

____
Signature of participant

Address: ____

Pseudonym preferred: __________________Date signed: ______________________________

For further information concerning the completion of the form, please contact Nicole Green @ ncgreen@ualberta.ca

For children

I, ____, give permission
(print name)
to :

- Be Observed
- Be Tape recorded
- Be Photographed

by Miss (Nicole) Green.

And to:

- Let Nicole Green keep drawings and photographs I make for her (These will not be published.)

I understand that:

- I may withdraw from the research at any time without penalty
- all information gathered will be treated confidentially and discussed only with the researcher's instructor
- any information that identifies me will be destroyed upon completion of this research
- I will not be identifiable in any documents resulting from this research

I also understand that the results of this research will be used in scholarly and professional publications and presentations and as Nicole Green's doctoral dissertation at the University of Alberta.

____
Student's name

____
Parent's signature

Address: ____

Telephone: __________________ Email: ______________________________

Pseudonym preferred: __________________ Date signed: __________________

For further information concerning the completion of the form, please contact Nicole Green @ ncgreen@ualberta.ca

APPENDIX C

CONVERSATIONS WITH HOME TUTORS

Interview 1

Let's begin with you telling me about yourself. If the TV show 'This Is Your Life' was here with a video camera, what would you choose to share about yourself?

Can you tell me about your earliest memory?

If school, ask about family. If family, ask about school.

Think back to your own school days. Can you recall a teacher with whom you had a good relationship?

What contributed to it being a good relationship?

In what ways did this relationship affect how you felt about teachers, school, and learning?

What do you remember about your school classrooms?

If we were able to take a 360 degree still photograph of the most memorable one, what would we see?

What rights did children have in this classroom?

What responsibilities did children have in this classroom?

What things, people, behaviours or actions would you change in this classroom? Why?

What atmosphere would this help to create?

Can you recall a teacher with whom you had a bad relationship?

What contributed to it being a bad relationship?

How did the relationship affect how you felt about teachers, school, and learning?
Can you share some positive family experiences from your own childhood up?

Can you share some negative family experiences from your own childhood up?

Describe a typical day in your family's life.

How long have you been enrolled in Distance Education? Did you begin when your oldest child began school?

Tell me about the path for becoming a home tutor – how did you prepare for the role?

Before your first child began distance education, what did you anticipate your involvement would be in your child/ren's schooling?

Were there any surprises in any aspects of your involvement in distance education?

Tell me about the schoolroom/the place for formal schooling?

Could you walk me through your memory of your most recent day teaching your children, telling me everything that happened and what each of the interactions or activities felt like for you?

What changes have you experienced in your involvement in your child/ren's schooling?

Interview 2

How do you conceive of your role in your child/ren's lives?

What is it like to be a home tutor?

What was it like when you first started teaching your children at home?

How has that changed?

What were some of the milestones?

As time has gone on, what has become easier, what has become more challenging?

What are the rewards and satisfactions?

What enables you to teach well?

What are your strengths?

What is challenging for you?

What obstacles get in your way? How do you overcome these or deal with them?

When you think about your teaching what are you most proud of?

When you think about your parenting role, what are you most proud of?

Is there any aspect of your teaching that you wish you could change?

Do you believe your teaching is a reflection of how you were taught?

Where do you get support for your role as a home tutor?

What other support would be helpful?

If you could give one piece of advice to a parent beginning the home schooling experience, what would it be?

What does it mean to teach and learn?

How would you describe your child as a learner?

In thinking about your children as learners, how is (child's name) the same or different from (child's name)?

What do you think is the most important thing your child/ren can get from their educational experience?

What do you hope for your child/ren now and in the future?

What goals would you like to see your child/ren strive for?

Interview 3

In what ways do you experience a sense of community as a home tutor and as a parent in the distance education landscape?

In what ways do you experience a sense of belonging as a home tutor and as a parent in the distance education landscape?

How would you describe the curriculum to someone who knew nothing about it?

Can you think of a metaphor for the connection or relationship between the distance education curriculum as plan and the distance education curriculum as lived?

How does the distance education curriculum reflect your family's life? And in particular your child/ren's lives?

In what ways is your knowledge and experience validated by the distance education curriculum?

In what ways is your child's knowledge and experience validated by the distance education curriculum?

What advice would you give to the curriculum planners, the people writing the distance education curriculum, if they were rewriting the entire curriculum?

Tell me about the ways you communicate with your child's teacher.

Tell me about the ways you communicate with others in the school community.

Tell me about the ways you communicate with family and friends.

In what ways have new technologies changed the way you communicate with the school community?

Describe an experience when you felt frustrated with the technologies that are designed to assist in communication or learning.

Describe an experience when you felt grateful for the technologies that are designed to assist in communication or learning.

In 1982, a man by the name of Fitzpatrick who had been investigating the new technology being introduced in a Western Australian distance education program, stated that he believed "the net result is not an elimination of isolation, but an alteration in its nature. Would you like to comment on that statement from your experience of the changes in technology?

What advice would you give to the principal and staff of a new school of distance education opening? What aspects of the program would you keep the same, what aspects would you alter or change completely?

APPENDIX D

CONVERSATIONS WITH CHILDREN

Interview 1

What's the best thing about being your age?

What's the hardest thing about being your age?

Sometimes we like to daydream about things we'd like to do, or things we'd like to try, or things we'd like to become. Can you remember anything you've ever daydreamed about?

If you could spend two weeks with someone who does a special kind of work, what kind of person would that be?

Is there something that you have always wanted to do but you haven't had the chance yet? What stopped you, no time, or materials, or resources? (Ellis, 1998)

Interview 2

Driskell (2002)

Place knowledge and use

> How would you describe the area where you live to someone who had never been there before?
>
> Please tell me all the places you know in your area?
>
> Would you please make a drawing of the area around where you live so that you can show me the places where you go and the places that are important to you?
>
> What title would you give this picture?

Tell me about your drawing? Or, what is going on in this picture?

In which of these areas do you spend most of your time? What do you do there?

Which of these areas is most important to you? Why is it important to you?

What three words would you use to describe this place?

Does anybody else know about this important place?

When you are feeling bad, where do you go to feel better?

Place ownership

Are there any places that you feel are your own?

Do you take any special care of any particular place?

Problem places

Are there any places where you do not like to go?

Are there any places where you are not allowed to go? Who forbids you? What are their reasons?

Are there places you cannot get into? Do you wish you could?

Are there dangerous places in your area? What makes them dangerous?

Ideal places

If you could design your perfect play space/school space, what would it look like (indoors or outdoors)?

Interview 3

What's the best part of the school day for you?

What are you really good at in your school work?

What is your Mum really good at in your school work together?

What would you change to make your school learning day better?

Draw me a picture of you having a good time with school learning and another having a not-so-good time with school learning.